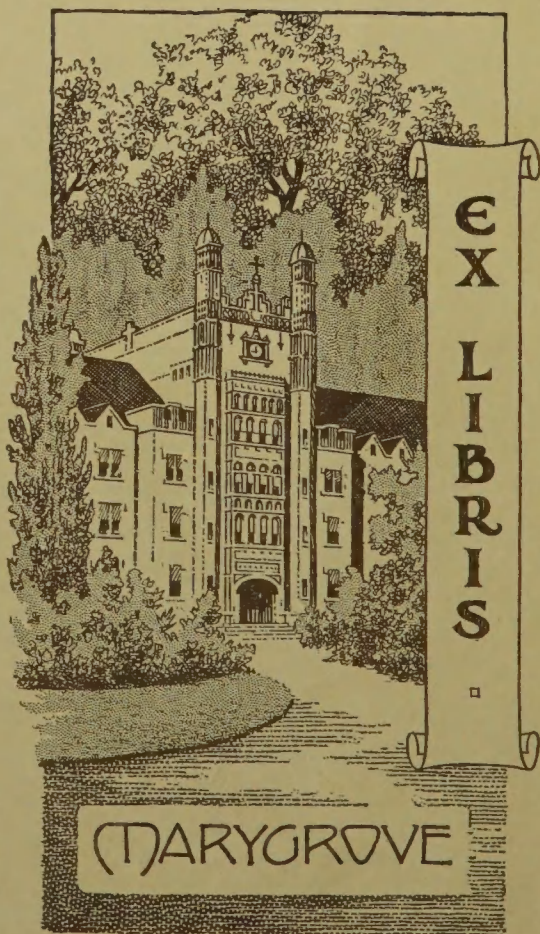


# GREAT INSPIRERS



J. A. ZAHM



Gift of  
Mrs. Harry Hamlin









# **GREAT INSPIRERS**

Books by J. A. Zahm  
(H. J. Mozans)

Great Inspirers

Through South America's  
Southland

Up the Orinoco and Down  
the Magdalena

Along the Andes and Down  
the Amazon

Woman in Science

---

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

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New York

# G R E A T I N S P I R E R S

BY

THE REVEREND J. A. ZAHM, C.S.C., PH.D.

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH SOUTH AMERICA'S SOUTHLAND," "ALONG THE ANDES  
AND DOWN THE AMAZON," "UP THE ORINOCO AND DOWN THE  
MAGDALENA," "WOMAN IN SCIENCE," ETC.



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AD

S. M. R. IN PATRIA

ATQUE

L. N. C. IN VIA

"Since the advent of Christianity, nothing great, it may be asserted, has been achieved in the Church without the coöperation of women. In the beginning many women descended into the amphitheatres with the martyrs. Others disputed with the anchorites the possession of the desert. Ere long Constantine hoisted the Laburnum on the Capitol and St. Helena raised the cross above the ruins of Jerusalem. Clovis at Tolbiac invoked the God of Clothilde. The tears of Monica atoned for the errors of Augustine. Jerome dedicated the Vulgate to the piety of two Roman women, Paula and Eustochium. St. Basil and St. Benedict, the first legislators of cenobitic life in the East, were specially aided by Macrina and Scholastica, their sisters. Later on, the Countess Matilda supports with her chaste hands the tottering throne of Gregory VII; Queen Blanche exercises a preponderating influence during the reign of St. Louis; Joan of Arc saves France; Isabella of Castile presides at the discovery of a new world. Finally, in a more recent age, one sees St. Teresa amid that group of bishops, doctors and founders of religious orders, who effected the interior reform of Catholic society. St. Francis de Sales cultivates the soul of Mme. de Chantal, as a chosen flower, and St. Vincent de Paul confides to Louise de Marillac the most admirable of his undertakings—the establishment of the Sisters of Charity."

—A. F. OZANAM in "*Dante et la philosophie catholique du treizième siècle.*" Part IV, Chap. II.



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In his "Confessions"—that most admirable soul-story of all time—St. Augustine devotes his most beautiful pages to a eulogy of his saintly mother, St. Monica. He tells us how, by her example, she rescued him from the mazes of error and the allurements of sin; how, by her beneficent influence on him, she directed his mind from things transitory to things eternal. She was thus his mother in a twofold sense. For, in the exquisite phrase of her illustrious son, "*me parturiit et carne, ut in hanc temporalem, et corde, ut in æternam lucem nascerer*"—she who was twice my mother, brought me to birth in the flesh, that I might be born into this earthly light; in heart that I might be born into light eternal.

This double-natured motherhood of St. Monica, in which that of inspirer is no less exalted and fecund than that of maternity itself, has often been noted in other women, but rarely, if ever, has it been so resplendent and so blessed in their off-

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spring as in the case of the devoted mother of St. Augustine.

Countless books have been written about woman, but their authors seem usually to ignore one of her noblest functions—that of inspirer. In reading of the women portrayed in these books one recalls an opposite statement in a little drama by the Italian playwright, Ferdinando Martini: "*Ci sono delle donne, ma la donna non c'è*"—Here are many women, but there is not a real woman among them all. The reason is not far to seek; for, in the majority of the books devoted to women, especially when written by men, most stress is laid on the part which women have played in the outward world, while little or nothing is said of the inward forces of which they are the center; of the silent influence which they are constantly exerting on father, husband, son or friend; of the power which they are secretly, but not the less effectively, wielding from the family hearth to the homes of science and the halls of legislation.

In a recent work of mine on "Woman in Science" there is a chapter entitled Women as Inspirers and Collaborators. This chapter shows how greatly some of the most eminent men of

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science have been beholden to their wives and sisters for a large measure of their success in their chosen life-work. As history is ordinarily written, however, all the great achievements in science are attributed solely to the sterner sex and no credit whatever is given to their fair companions who were frequently the inspirers of the noblest conceptions of men of science, and who, by their sympathy and encouragement and active coöperation, more frequently still enabled them to achieve their most brilliant successes, when they were on the verge of yielding to despair.

We have but to read of the assistance and encouragement given to Galileo by his loving daughter, Sister Celeste; to the great mathematician Viète by the accomplished Princess de Rohan; to Pasteur by his devoted wife; to Sir William Herschel by his self-sacrificing sister, Caroline, in order to realize the truth of Buckle's statement that women, in collaborating with men of science, "exercise the most momentous and salutary influence over the method by which scientific discoveries are made." We are then quite ready to agree with John Stuart Mill when, speaking from experience, he asserts: "Hardly anything can



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be of greater value to a man of theory and speculation who employs himself, not in collecting materials of knowledge by observation, but in working them up by processes of thought into comprehensive truths of science and laws of conduct, than to carry on his speculations in the companionship and under the criticism of a really superior woman."

What is true of women as inspirers in science is truer still of them in the arts and in literature. The greatest flights of genius of such composers as Liszt, Wagner, Mozart, Chopin, Beethoven—not to mention others scarcely less renowned—were inspired by woman's love and sympathy. In sculpture and painting we need recall only the instance of Michelangelo, who speaks of "the influence of Vittoria Colonna" as the tool by which his own genius had been formed and which, when removed to heaven, left him no earthly substitute.

It would require volumes to tell what women as inspirers have achieved in the domain of literature. The brilliant French writer, M. Clavière, avers that "there is hardly a philosopher or a poet of the sixteenth century whose pages are not

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illumined or gladdened by the smile of some high-born lady." He might, with equal truth, have made the same statement regarding woman's influence not only on philosophers and poets, but also on men of letters in general, in every century since Christianity converted her from the slave to the equal of man.

Wordsworth in "The Prelude" expresses the indebtedness which, in hours of trial and depression, countless poets and men of letters have felt, when he writes of his beloved sister, Dorothy, that she

Maintained for me ■ saving intercourse

With my true self; for though bedimmed and  
changed

Much, as it seemed, I was no further changed

Than as a clouded and a waning moon;

She whispered still that brightness would return.

She in the midst of all preserved me still

A Poet, made me seek beneath that name,

And that alone, my office upon earth.

Similar tributes to the benign influence of Leonora d'Este, Catherina de Athayde, and Meta Klopstock occur in the pages of Tasso, Camões

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and Klopstock, each of whom could assert of his fair inspirer what Petrarch says of Laura:

Thus, if in me is nurst

Any good fruit, from you the seed came first;  
To you, if such appear, the praise is due.

Barren myself till fertilized by you.

In the present volume I have confined myself to the consideration of the influence of "The Eternal Womanly" on only two men. The one is St. Jerome, the illustrious Father and Doctor of the Church; the other is Dante Alighieri, the pride of Italy and the glory of Christendom. I have selected these two men because they are the most illustrious representatives of two of the greatest turning points of history. Jerome is the chief representative of that period of the world which was intermediary between antiquity and the Middle Ages; between paganism and Christianity. More than any of his contemporaries, he gives us in his writings a faithful mirror of the profoundly perturbed fourth century. This is because he was truly *pars magna*—the central and dominating figure—of his time. For whether we consider him as "the Christian Cicero," the learned translator



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of the Hebrew Scriptures, the ardent theological polemic, the indefatigable defender of the faith, or the passionate propagator of monasticism in the West, he is one of the most remarkable men in the history of the Church, and one who has never ceased to exercise a peculiar fascination on the minds of all students of history, literature and dogma. In view of his vast erudition, the learned Benedictine, Jean Martianay, did not hesitate to apply to Jerome the words, "*Uno ore plurimæ consentiunt gentes, populi primum fuisse virum*"—He was unanimously acclaimed the first man of his age.

As St. Jerome was the connecting link between paganism and Christianity so was Dante the chief nexus between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. For Dante was not only, in the words of Ruskin, "the great prophetic exponent of the heart of the Middle Ages," but he was also the one from whom modern European literature dates, as truly as Hellenic literature dates from Homer. And, although Jerome and Dante were separated from each other by nine centuries, their aims, ideals, and lives exhibited a striking similarity. They were both dowered by talents of the

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highest order. They were both lifelong students and did not hesitate, in their quest of knowledge, to undertake frequent and arduous journeys to strange and distant lands. Both of them were terrible and relentless adversaries when pitched against evildoers or disseminators of error. No two men ever wielded more caustic pens, or possessed greater powers of invective when assailing the vices and the vicious of their respective centuries. With the telling ridicule of Plautus and the mordant satire of Lucilius and Juvenal, they mercilessly attacked their opponents and condemned to eternal infamy—often by a single stroke of the pen—those whose hypocrisy and injustice had aroused their indignation. Many of these miscreants live in history solely because they have received unenviable immortality in the pages of Jerome and Dante Alighieri.

Inseparably associated with St. Jerome and Dante are their incomparable inspirers, Paula, Eustochium, and Beatrice Portmari. Belonging to the most illustrious families of Rome and Florence, their souls were, from their childhood, inflamed by the healthful glow of the Italian sun and by a love of purity and virtue that communi-

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cated itself to all with whom they came in contact. It was their communion with these pure and devoted women that unlocked the brains and hearts of Jerome and Dante and made them both immortal.

For Dante, Beatrice was

The solitary star  
Which rose and set not to the last,

and which, during all the trying vicissitudes of his eventful life, enabled him to ride "sublime upon the seraph wings of ecstasy."

For Jerome, Paula and Eustochium were not only inspirers but also collaborators. Among the women who, in the words of Petrarch, united purest heart with highest intellect—

*In alto intelletto un puro corde,*

and who in the history of literature have "shed the dew of inspiration" on men of transcendent genius and sublime achievement, they stand absolutely unique—the glory of their sex and the admiration of the world. They prove the truth of the statement of the French writer who declared that "virtue alone is capable of making impres-

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sions that death does not efface." Through their holy affection for the saintly hermit of Bethlehem, through their zealous and enthusiastic coöperation with him in his monumental life-work, but above all, through the admirable sanctity of their lives, they, with Beatrice, will ever remain the highest types of those noble women, who, while helping others to achieve undying fame, will in story be forever associated with those to whom they were both lodestars and guardian angels. They were, indeed, to use the words of Plato, "gracious to good men, the admiration of wise men. . . . They were the treasure of the fortunate, the guardians of the good, the transmuters of the bad. In fears and difficulties they were the best of guides, encouragers, friends, saviors."

In writing the following pages I have cherished the hope that they might prove an incentive to someone to undertake a comprehensive work on ■ number of the most noted of the fair inspirers of men of letters. The material for such ■ volume—one which has long been wanting—is as abundant as it is interesting and valuable.

If this little book shall, even remotely, be instrumental in supplying such a desideratum and

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shall beget in the reader some of my own admiration for the heroes and heroines of whom I have given but the briefest sketch, I shall have every reason to be both gratified and grateful.

J. A. ZAHM.





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**PART I**

**A FATHER OF THE CHURCH AND  
HIS INSPIRERS AND  
COLLABORATORS**





## CHAPTER I

### SOWING THE SEED <sup>1</sup>

No period of history is more conspicuous for stirring and far-reaching events than is the second half of the fourth century of the Christian Era. It was this period that beheld the dissolution of the great Roman Empire, that witnessed the decisive combat between paganism and Christianity, and that rejoiced in some of the noblest achievements of Christian scholarship.

For years before the *débâcle* came, it was evident to all clear-visioned observers that the mightiest nation that the world had yet known was fated to be the victim of its own luxury and corruption. Not a day passed

<sup>1</sup> Some passages in this and the following chapter have appeared in an article which I wrote some years ago, under a pseudonym, for the *Catholic World*.

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that did not deplore the fall of some portion of the great edifice to whose erection Roman valor and statesmanship had devoted ten long centuries and whose duration Roman citizens had fondly thought would prove eternal. Consuls, governors of provinces, and men who had attained the highest honors of the empire finished their days in disgrace and misery. Even the Caesars themselves—those masters of the world, before whom the universe trembled—occupied the throne but a short time before meeting with a tragic death. On all sides the empire was attacked by hordes of barbarians—by Vandals, by Goths, by Quadi, by Sarmatians, who were soon followed by Huns and Ethiopians, Heruli and Numidians. Everywhere they dealt terrific blows to the imperial forces. From the Julian Alps to the Thracian Bosphorus, the country was ravaged by fire and sword, and the Roman eagle, which for centuries had flown above victorious

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legions in countless battlefields, was trampled in the dust by rude warriors from the valleys of the Danube and the Vistula.

From the frontiers of the empire these countless hosts moved with irresistible force towards the heart of the Roman world. In 402 Alaric was master of the territory from Venice to the Po, and was marching on towards Rome when his course was arrested by Stilicho at Pollentia. During the latter part of this fateful year, the Alani, the Suevi, and the Vandals crossed the Rhine and inundated Gaul and Spain, both of which were then lost to the empire. Shortly afterward Britain declared its independence. Then Alaric reappeared, and, in a brief time, Rome, so long the mistress of the world, was at his feet—a toy for his wrath and a pawn for his unbridled lust of power.

While the barbarians of the North were overrunning the empire of the Caesars and infusing new blood into the corrupt and de-

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cadent races of the South, Christianity, made strong by three centuries of persecution, was already preparing to celebrate her triumph over an effete paganism. The contest of the rival religions had been long and obstinate. In spite of its moral, social, and doctrinal weaknesses polytheism kept up a vigorous struggle until the last. It was a curious spectacle to behold paganism, deprived of vitality and facing inevitable dissolution, obstinately persisting in its futile struggle and unwilling, even in its death throes, to acknowledge defeat. It did not, indeed, admit itself conquered until it became aware that the smoke of sacrifice had ceased to rise from its altars; that its most sumptuous and imposing temples had been dedicated to the Crucified; that its most cherished idols had become objects of derision, even among those who had previously shown them most honor; that the Cross had been exalted above the capitol; that the Emperor Julian, their

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last, forlorn hope, had exclaimed in the agony of death: *Νενίκηκας Γαλιλαῖε*—Galilean, thou hast conquered!

But while paganism, unwilling to be regenerated, was falling a victim of its own vices and corruption, Christianity was daily becoming more powerful and, conscious of her divine mission, was preparing, even before the Sack of Rome by Alaric, to evangelize the barbarians and create a new world—Christian Europe.

And how well she was equipped for this stupendous task! Never before could she count so many men of brilliant genius and profound scholarship as were at her service during the second half of the fourth century. It is true that during the period of persecution she had such eminent teachers and apologists as Tertullian, Origen, St. Justin, St. Cyprian, Lactantius, Arnobius, and Clement of Alexandria. But, after the Church had left the Catacombs, and was free to



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preach the gospel in the open, the number of her learned sons became much greater. And, when we reach the latter half of the fourth century, we find a splendid galaxy of illustrious doctors who are still the glory of their age and faith. In the East were St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory of Nazienzus and St. Basil the Great—known as “the three Cappadocians.” There were also St. Athanasius, the illustrious patriarch of Alexandria, St. Epiphanius, the pentaglot bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, and St. John Chrysostom, “the greatest preacher ever heard in a Christian pulpit.” In the West were the learned St. Hilary, St. Ambrose, the preëminent ecclesiastical teacher, and St. Augustine who, as I have elsewhere observed, “combined the searching and potent dialectics of Plato, the profound scientific conceptions of Aristotle, the learning and versatility of Origen, the grace and eloquence of Basil and Chrysostom. Whether

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we regard him as philosopher, theologian, or exegetist—the Doctor of Grace is ever admirable, at once the glory of the Church and the master of the ages.”<sup>1</sup> For keenness of intellect, profundity of thought and breadth of scholarship these illustrious divines remained unrivaled until the days of Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus, Peter Abelard, and St. Thomas Aquinas—the illustrious “Angel of the Schools.”

It was when the activities of the eminent Greek and Latin doctors of the fourth century began to attract most attention that the Eternal City welcomed within its walls a Dalmatian monk who was destined to occupy a most conspicuous place among them and to achieve a work which was to render both him and his collaborators immortal. His somber habit and his intellectual features, bronzed by the fiery sun of the Syrian des-

<sup>1</sup> “Bible, Science and Faith,” pp. 70, 71, Baltimore, 1895.

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ert, where he had led the life of an anchorite, attracted special attention whenever he appeared in public. But this strangely garbed man was not unknown in Rome. For he had, during his youth, studied there under the celebrated grammarian, Donatus, and had early become distinguished for his knowledge and eloquence. He was a native of Stridon, a small town on the southern slope of the Illyrian Alps, and his full name, in Latin, was Eusebius Hieronymus. He is, however, better known to us as St. Jerome, who, in his mature years, became famous for his translation of the Bible from the original tongues into Latin, and for being the most erudite of all the Fathers of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Referring to the vast erudition of St. Jerome, Erasmus, who was one of the most learned of the Humanists, if not the most learned, asks what scholar of antiquity can be compared with Jerome for the extent and variety of his knowledge, sacred and profane. "*Sin doctrinam exigas, quæso te, quem habet*

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Jerome, even while a student under Donatus, became noted for his great love of books and for his insatiable thirst for knowledge. At an early age he had mastered the literatures and philosophies of Greece and Rome and was soon regarded by his contemporaries as a prodigy of learning. Like Petrarch long afterwards, he became celebrated as a book collector. Books that he could not purchase he copied with his own hand. He thus gradually became the possessor of a large and valuable library. This he always kept with him—even during his peregrinations to distant parts of the world.

vel eruditissima Græcia sic absolutum in omni doctrinæ genere, ut cum Hieronimo sit committendus? Quis unquam pari felicitate omnes totius eruditionis partes conjunxit et absolvit? Quis unquam in tot linguis antecelluit unus? Cui tanta historiarum, tanta geographiæ, tanta antiquitatis notitia contigit unquam? Quis unquam sacrarum ac profanarum omnium literarum et parem et absolutam scientiam est assecutus?" Migne, J. P. (Editor), "Patrologiæ Latinæ," Tom. XXIII, col. 1552. Paris, 1883.

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Following the example of Plato, Jerome's chief purpose in traveling was to acquire knowledge. It is to him that we owe the expression which distinguishes the curious tourist from the intelligent traveler: *Discendi studio peregrinationes institutæ sunt*—The love of study has begot the desire to travel. And the result of his observations in many lands—in Europe, in Asia, in Africa—is seen not only in his literary and philosophical, but also, and especially, in his historical and Scriptural works. Speaking of the value of travel as an aid to Scriptural study, he declares: "As one better understands the history of the Greeks when one has seen Athens, and the third book of the *Æneid*, when one has come by way of Leucate and the Acroceraunian Mountains, from the Troad to Sicily, in order to enter the embouchure of the Tiber, so, also, one better understands the Holy Scriptures when one has traversed Judea, interrogated the souve-



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nirs of its ancient cities and studied its geography.”<sup>1</sup>

Some years after leaving the school of Donatus, Jerome, who had been deeply impressed by all that he had learned respecting the self-sacrificing lives of the monks of the Thebaid, resolved to follow in their footsteps. He accordingly set out for Syria. However, instead of going by sea, as was then customary, he chose to go overland by way of the Danube, Thrace and Asia Minor. Bearing in mind the unsettled condition of the Roman Empire at this period and the great lack of communications in the countries traversed, we can easily imagine how terrific must have been the fatigues and suf-

<sup>1</sup> Quomodo Græcorum historias magis intelligunt, qui Athenas viderint, et tertium Virgilii librum, qui a Troade per Leucaten, et Acroceraunia ad Siciliam, et inde ad ostia Tiberis navigaverint; ita Sanctam Scripturam lucidius intuebitur, qui Judæam oculis contempletus est; et antiquarum urbium memorias, locorumque vel eadem vocabula, vel mutata cognoverit. Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXIX, col. 423.

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ferings which so long a journey entailed and how great and numerous were the difficulties which everywhere confronted the traveler. But these did not in the least deter Jerome from carrying out his project or dampen his ardor to imitate the saintly lives of Paul and Anthony, who were then the glory of Christian Egypt.

During this long journey, as in all he had made previously, Jerome was continually adding to his already vast stores of knowledge. His precious library was always at his side and some favorite author was usually in his hand. Besides this, he always sought out men of learning in all the countries he visited, and, in this wise, he eventually became as familiar with the history and traditions of the East as he was with those of the West.

He was not long in Syria before he determined to fix his abode in the torrid and inhospitable desert of Chalcis. Here, while

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practicing the greatest austerities, he continued the study of his favorite authors in Latin and Greek. In addition to this, he took up the study of Hebrew, of which he ultimately became so great a master.

From Chalcis Jerome went to Jerusalem. But his sojourn there was short. Although no one could have been more interested in the venerable spectacles which everywhere greeted his admiring gaze, what this ardent student then most felt the need of was knowledge—ever more knowledge. He wished to be identified with that great movement of ideas, of which the three great Cappadocians—Saints Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazienzus—were then the acknowledged leaders. Labor and the acquisition of knowledge were the great needs of his soul.<sup>1</sup> A life of inactivity to him was

<sup>1</sup> Referring to St. Jerome's lifelong love of learning, and his extraordinary assiduity in all intellectual pursuits, a German writer declares that knowledge

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unbearable. He, accordingly, threw himself, with his usual *élan*, into the great intellectual current which was then giving such vigorous life to the Church in the Orient.

To quench his thirst for knowledge, he proceeded to Constantinople, where the illustrious Gregory of Nazienzus was bishop. This accomplished prelate was then looked upon as the greatest light of the Eastern Church, and posterity has ratified the opinion of his contemporaries. Villeman calls him the greatest poet of Oriental Christendom. On account of his profound knowledge of Scripture and theology he has been

was the spouse of the studious Dalmatian monk as poverty was the spouse of St. Francis of Assisi—"Ist etwas echt an ihm, so ist es seine aufrichtige Liebe zur Wissenschaft, seine unausrottbare Neigung zur gelehrten Beschäftigung. Die Wissenschaft war die Braut des Hieronymus, wie die Braut des hl. Franz die Armut, erst die weltliche, später die Kirchliche Wissenschaft." Georg Grützmacher, "Hieronymus, Eine Biographische Studie zur Alten Kirchengeschichte," vol. I, p. 127, Berlin, 1901-1908.

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surnamed *Theologus*. And for the same reason, added to his great sanctity, he has been named "the Divine"—a title that has been given to no other saint of the Church, except to St. John, the Beloved Apostle.

Gregory found in Jerome a kindred spirit and, in spite of their disparity of age, the two soon became fast friends. The venerable bishop gladly opened to the inquiring spirit of his young friend those treasures of Eastern knowledge for which the eager mind of Jerome was then so athirst. During the rest of his life the Dalmatian monk was wont to glory in having had so excellent a preceptor.

While he was pursuing his Scriptural studies under Gregory, Jerome had opportunities of becoming acquainted with many of the most celebrated doctors of the Eastern Church. Among these was St. Gregory of Nyssa, whose theory of cosmogony, as developed in his "Hexaemeron," "must always

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be regarded as a marvel of scientific divination that is unsurpassed even by the boldest conceptions of that master-intellect of the world—Aristotle. He also recognized the existence of natural laws which he was unable to detect, much less comprehend—laws made known long ages afterwards by the investigations of Kepler, Newton and Platteau.”<sup>1</sup>

From Constantinople Jerome returned to Rome. A plenary council of the Church’s hierarchy had been summoned by Pope Damasus to meet there, in the year 382, and, although he had not been invited to this important convention, the zealous Dalmatian, because of important questions affecting the Eastern Church, which he knew were to be discussed in the council, felt that his familiarity with these made it his duty to be present in the Eternal City in the event that his services should be required.

<sup>1</sup> Vid. author’s “Bible, Science and Faith,” p. 67.

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As on his way eastward, so now, on his return journey, he elected to travel by land rather than by sea. He wished to study the country and the people whose literature had always had such a fascination for him. He, therefore, traversed Greece from one end to the other. His entire journey was one of observation and study, during which he classified in his marvelous memory those vast treasures of erudition of which he subsequently made such splendid use in his manifold writings.

In a preceding page, mention has been made of the cordial welcome accorded by the Romans to the coarsely garbed, bronze-faced Dalmatian on his return from the distant and mysterious East. All classes, especially those who still remembered his triumphs as a student of letters and eloquence, vied with one another in showing honor to one whose fame for learning—sacred and profane—had preceded him. But that which

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exercised even a greater fascination over the minds of the Romans than the great traveler's erudition, were his reputation for sanctity, his character as an anchorite, his eloquent letters from the desert, which had been read and admired by everyone and which had inspired many to embrace the mode of life which had so charmed Jerome in Chalcis, and had brought such peace and happiness to the solitaries of the Thebaid.

The one who was the first to recognize the great ability of the famous traveler and scholar, and to realize what important services the humble monk would be able to render the Church, was Pope Damasus, who was then occupying the chair of Peter. This venerable pontiff was eminent for virtue and knowledge—*vir egregius et omni genere virtutis ornatus*—and is classed by historians as one of the leading figures of the early Papacy and as one who contributed, in a remarkable degree, toward the splendor of the



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Church, and toward the development of Christian piety and learning. On account of his celebrated work in the Catacombs it has been said of him that he revealed to the surprised Romans a new city which they learned with astonishment they had long been treading without knowing it.

The Sovereign Pontiff not only testified his great esteem and affection for Jerome, but also showed his confidence in his knowledge and ability by appointing him secretary of the assembled council. This was, indeed, a great honor for a monk who had just arrived from the Orient and whom many of the Western bishops scarcely knew by name. But this was not all. After the council had concluded its deliberations, Damasus made Jerome secretary of the papal chancery, which had charge of many of the most important matters connected with ecclesiastical administration.

It was while Jerome was occupying this

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position that he received from Damasus, who was deeply interested in Scriptural studies, a commission to revise the version of the Gospels then used in the Eternal City and to make a new translation of the other books of the New Testament. The originals of these, which had been written in Greek, had given rise to numerous Latin translations, many of which were so full of errors and so different one from the other that Jerome declared there were almost as many versions as there were copies—*tot sunt exemplaria pæne quot codices*.

For this important work the Pope could not have selected one who was better equipped for the task than was his learned secretary. Thoroughly familiar with the texts used in the Eastern Church, and providentially prepared for the work by his admirable course of Scripture under St. Gregory of Nazienzus, Jerome made a thorough revision of the existing Latin translations on

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the basis of the most approved Greek originals and, in a short time, was able to place in the hands of the Sovereign Pontiff a copy of the New Testament in which the purity of the Sacred Text was again fully reëstablished. So great an authority as St. Augustine wrote Jerome that he thanked God that so excellent a version was at last available for the use of the faithful of the Western Church.

One would think that Jerome's manifold duties as secretary to Damasus, combined with his Scriptural labors, would have left him absolutely no time for any other work. But so indefatigable a toiler as the Dalmatian monk, who made such constant use of the midnight oil, could always devise means to secure leisure when the welfare of others demanded his services. And as subsequent events proved, it was precisely at this busy period of his life that the former solitary of Chalcis entered upon what was

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to be the most remarkable period of his brilliant career.

Among those to whom the learning and saintliness of Jerome appealed quite as strongly as they did to Pope Damasus were many of the noblest patrician women of Rome—representatives of the Scipios, the Fabii, the Camilli, the Marcelli and other families scarcely less renowned. His monk's garb, his austere visage furrowed by penance and tanned by the sun of the Eastern desert, his vast erudition, fervid and impetuous eloquence, his animated gestures and peculiar accent due to his ten years' absence from the Roman capital, gave to his words a strange charm, and to himself an ascendancy over the minds of his hearers that was quite irresistible. They questioned him about his travels, about the solitaries of the desert, about his studies in Constantinople. But that which most interested them was the Sacred Scriptures. Knowing that they had

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before them the greatest living authority on Biblical lore, they at once resolved to secure his services as a teacher. Jerome hesitated to accede to their wishes, and did not do so, apparently, until after Pope Damasus had interested himself in their behalf. It was then arranged that his lessons and conferences should be given in a palace on the Aventine, belonging to a distinguished patrician widow named Marcella—known in Catholic hagiology as St. Marcella—a descendant of the old and noble family of the Marcelli, so famous in the annals of the Roman world. She was regarded by her contemporaries as the most beautiful of Roman ladies. But her talent and virtue were even more exceptional.

When she was still a young girl, her mother, Albina, had given hospitality to St. Athanasius, the illustrious Patriarch of Alexandria, who was then an exile from his see. The visage and the conversations of the ven-

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erable prelate concerning the monks of the Egyptian desert made on Marcella, whose ardent soul was naturally inclined to great things, a most profound impression. Seeds were then implanted in her generous heart that were destined to produce a fruitage that was to astonish the world.

When the premature death of her husband left her a widow Marcella resolved to put into execution a project which had long been uppermost in her thoughts. That was to follow in the footsteps of those holy men and women of the desert, whose wonderful lives had so thrilled her when, as a young girl, she had listened spellbound to the venerable Athanasius discoursing on the marvels achieved by St. Paul, St. Anthony, and their thousands of spiritual children.

To the amazement—or rather the consternation—of the patrician society of Rome it was one day learned that Marcella had bidden adieu to all her rich garments and

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jewels and had donned the rough and somber habit of a nun. Not only this; she had converted her sumptuous palace on the Aventine into a retreat where her life was devoted to prayer and works of mercy. The outcry at this strange innovation was at first very great. But the surpassing virtue of Marcella soon silenced criticism, and it was not long before she had gathered about her a multitude of widows and young maidens from the noblest families in the capital, who, like herself, desired to follow, under her direction, the same kind of life that had, in the beginning, so shocked all the leaders of patrician Rome. Marcella had, in fact, founded the first convent ever seen in the proud City of the Seven Hills and she was herself the first of Roman women to embrace the monastic state.

But her convent quickly became more than a refuge from the frivolity and corruption of the capital. It was also soon recognized

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as a center of works of charity such as the city of the Caesars had not before known. The care of the poor and the sick had never been a pagan virtue and it was not until the advent of Christianity that the precept, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," was put in practice. But it was not until the flower of patrician society, which had gathered about Marcella in her Aventine home, had begun their sublime works of charity that the selfish and pleasure-loving pagans of imperial Rome began to realize the full significance of Christian charity and devotion. Women who had been brought up in the lap of luxury, who never left their sumptuous marble abodes except when borne in golden litters by robust slaves, and who were so delicate that they complained of the weight of their silken raiment, were now seen wending their way, roughly appareled, through the poorest quarters of the Subura and bringing food and clothing to the homes of indigence



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and misfortune. And yet more, these same women were found ministering to the sick and the dying with a sweetness and a charity that silenced the blasphemy on the lips of the sufferer and prepared him to receive with thanksgiving and joy the message of the Savior.

It was due to the munificence of the patrician Fabiola, also one of the friends of Marcella and one of the frequenters of her convent on the Aventine, that the first hospitals and asylums were erected in Rome and its environs. What an immense advance this was for the welfare of the poor and the sick may be gauged from the fact that pagan Rome had never, during its entire history, established a single institution of public beneficence. Hence, when Fabiola, who was a descendant of the celebrated Fabius Cunctator, opened, for the benefit of suffering humanity, her splendid institutions of charity, her deeds of unheard-of benevolence were

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heralded throughout the world as the beginning of a new era. In his beautiful eulogy on this philanthropic daughter of the Fabii, St. Jerome describes her as "the glory of the Church, the astonishment of paganism, the mother of the poor," and gives a touching picture of her as she spends her immense fortune for the relief of the indigent and has the sick and dying brought to her hospitals from the public places and from the dark and noisome streets of the imperial capital. When she had a hospice built at Portus Romanus, the news of it was at once carried on the wings of fame to the uttermost parts of the earth. "Far-off Britain," continues Jerome, "learned in the summer what Egypt and Parthia had known in the preceding spring."<sup>1</sup> To us who are so familiar with the heroism of a St. Vincent de Paul, a Flor-

<sup>1</sup> Sub una æstate didicit Britannia quod Ægyptus et Parthus noverat vere. Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXII, col. 697.

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ence Nightingale and a Father Damien, and who live in an age when every city and town has its hospitals and asylums, where provision is made for every kind of human misery, it is difficult to realize the amazement which took possession of the Romans when they first became aware of the miracles of charity which were being wrought by the noble patrician women who had gathered under the banner of the saintly Marcella and her ardent associates of the Aventine convent.

“Was it not, indeed, an admirable spectacle which was offered by the heiresses of the most glorious names of idolatrous Rome—the daughters of the Scipios, the Marcelli, the Camilli—when they consecrated themselves to works of charity, and sacrificed their wealth, their beauty, their youth in order to succor the sick and the poor, as if, by a worthy expiation, Divine Providence had willed that the most humble consolers of humanity should proceed from the midst of

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those families whose glory had before so oppressed the earth?"<sup>1</sup>

But Marcella's palatial abode was yet more than a house of prayer and a center whence ever radiated the most sublime deeds of Christian charity and sacrifice. It was likewise a home of learning whose fame was soon spread far and wide not only on account of the number of those who flocked thither in quest of knowledge but also, and particularly, because of the high rank and eminent virtue of those who were found within its hallowed walls.

A part of Marcella's marble palace with its golden ceilings was set apart for an oratory which was designed for the use of the eager students who flocked in ever increasing numbers to hear the eloquent and scholarly Dalmatian discourse on the Holy Scriptures. For this reason Jerome called

<sup>1</sup> Villemain, "Nouveaux Mélanges Historiques et Littéraires." Tom. III, p. 439, Paris, 1827.

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Marcella's home on the Aventine *Ecclesia Domestica*—the Church of the Household—an institution which, during the close of the fourth and the opening of the fifth century, was the glory of the Church not only in the West but also in the East.

Chief among the frequenters of this holy retreat were Paula and her two daughters, Blesilla and Eustochium, who possessed in a preëminent degree all the glories of beauty, talent and fortune, and who were bound to Marcella by the tenderest ties of religion and affection. Paula, Jerome informs us, occupied the first place in the senate of Roman matrons. On her mother's side she was the daughter of the Scipios, the Pauli, and the Gracchi—families that had given to Rome her most illustrious generals, orators and statesmen. Through her father, who was a Greek, she was descended from the half fabulous kings of Sparta and Mycenae. She therefore could proudly suspend in the

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atrium of her palatial home the images of Æmilius Paulus and Agamemnon. Mother and children, who, besides the two daughters mentioned, included two others—Paulina and Rufina—and an only son, Toxotius, were of exceptional intelligence, which had been fully developed by the best masters of Greece and Rome. They all spoke Latin and Greek equally well, and their intellectual attainments were as varied as they were profound.

With such pupils as Marcella and her friends, Paula and her daughters, Jerome had an auditory that was in every way remarkable. But never did students have a more distinguished master. Not since the days when the divine Plato discoursed on philosophy in the peaceful groves of Academus and in the classic halls of Syracuse was there such enthusiasm for learning as there was in that wonderful school on the Aventine where Jerome held his audience

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spellbound by his erudition and eloquence. His mastery of literary style, that then so enchanted his fair hearers, has won for him from posterity the epithet: "The Christian Cicero." Indeed, no less an authority than Erasmus, himself a master of the purest Latinity, places Jerome as a writer above the illustrious Roman orator and philosopher whose works, for two thousand years, have universally been accepted as the most perfect models of literary excellence.<sup>1</sup>

But what charmed his students more than his matchless command of the languages of Greece and Rome was Jerome's wonderful

<sup>1</sup> *Sin eloquentiæ laudem requiras, in hac certe Christianos scriptores universos tanto post se reliquit intervallo, ut nec hi cum Hieronymo conferri queant, qui vitam omnem in uno bene dicendi studio contriverunt: ac prorsus tantum abest, ut quisquam sit nostræ religionis scriptor, quam cum hoc possis componere, ut, meo judicio, Ciceronem etiam ipsum suffragiis omnium eloquentiæ Romanæ principem, nonnullis dicendi virtutibus superet.* Quoted in Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXIII, col. 1552.

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knowledge of Hebrew—a language then almost unknown in the Eternal City—and his astonishing erudition in everything that related to the Sacred Scriptures. The great scholar, however, soon had reason to be as much impressed by the profound thought and the surprising mental acumen of his pupils as they were by his vast range of learning and the facility which he possessed of communicating his rare intellectual treasures to others. For he soon discovered, especially in the case of Marcella, Paula and her daughters, Blesilla and Eustochium, that his hearers were as distinguished for their talent and love of learning as they were for their great wealth, noble lineage, and purity of life. In order to have a better understanding of the Sacred Text, they set to work, under their master's guidance, to acquire a knowledge of Hebrew, and it was not long before the Church of the Household resounded with the Psalms of David



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sung in the language in which they had been composed by the royal prophet. Marcella, Paula and her two daughters, Eustochium and Blesilla, were particularly proficient in this noble but difficult tongue.

Never were students more interested in their work than were those who followed the instructions of Jerome in the convent on the Aventine. Not satisfied with listening to the words that fell from his lips, not content with his explanations of the chapters of the Bible that constituted the day's lesson, they plied him with questions of all kinds, until, as he himself confessed, he felt that he was in the presence of masters rather than pupils.

And, besides this, they demanded more than simple oral teaching. They desired to have their master's lessons in permanent form. At the urgent solicitation of Blesilla, Jerome wrote a commentary on Ecclesiastes. But this, with other works then written at

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the request of his eager pupils, was but the prelude to the stupendous Scriptural works which he subsequently undertook at the instance of Paula and Eustochium—the prelude, too, of woman's share in the great Dalmatian's life-work—labors which were to confer immortality on both the master and his gifted pupils and inspirers.

The serious character of the studies engaged in by Jerome's pupils, as well as the success which attended their efforts, is well illustrated by what is related of Blesilla, who, at her master's request, took up the study of Hebrew in order that she might read the Sacred Text in the original. For her this seemingly tremendous task was but child's play. "That which all Greece had admired in the great Origen was," Jerome assures us, "now exemplified in this young woman of twenty years. Not months, but days only sufficed for her to overcome the difficulties of this language, and to understand and to

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chant the Psalms in Hebrew, as well as Paula, her mother.”<sup>1</sup>

But this extraordinary young woman was not content with studying the New Testament in Greek and the Old Testament in Hebrew. For, in addition to reading the Sacred Books in the original, she made a special study of the Greek commentators, particularly Origen. And that those who were unacquainted with Greek might be able to enjoy her favorite author in a translation, she begged Jerome to make a Latin version of Origen's voluminous commentaries on the Gospels of Sts. Matthew, Luke and John. Imagine a young woman of the “Smart Set,” or of New York's “Four Hundred,” spending her time on such works as those of the

<sup>1</sup> “Jam vero, quod in Origine quoque illo Græcia toto miratur, in paucis non dicam mensibus, sed diebus, ita hebrææ linguæ vicerat difficultates, ut in discendis canendisque psalmis cum matre contenderet.” “Epistola ad Paulam super obitu Blesillæ filiæ.” Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXII, col. 466.

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author of the "Hexapla" and the "Peri Archon," and finding such delight in them as to make provision to have her friends share her pleasure in reading them!

Never before had Rome witnessed such ardor in the study of Scripture, and never before or since was there assembled for such study so distinguished and so intelligent a group of women. Such great progress in the knowledge of Scripture had some of them made—notably Marcella, a woman of remarkable mentality—that they were consulted on difficult passages of Holy Writ, by laity and clergy alike. But such was the modesty of Marcella that she never gave an opinion as her own. She always said she but repeated what she had learned from her master.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In his letter to Principia, on the death of Marcella, Jerome writes: *Quid in illa virtutum, quid ingenii, quid sanctitatis, quid puritatis invenerim, vereor dicere, ne fidem credulitatis excedam. Hoc solum dicam, quod quidquid in nobis longi fuit studio con-*

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And never was there more sympathetic co-operation in a great cause, such a pious union of hearts and souls as that which existed between the master and the pupils of the Church of the Household. Nothing was more touching than the sweet familiarity, full of confidence and respect; the tender friendship, noble and pure, which bound Marcella and her illustrious friends to their devoted teacher.<sup>1</sup> But all this, together with their astonishing ardor in study, their admirable docility in following the directions of their illustrious preceptor, was not more remarkable than the fond solicitude of the

gregatum, et meditatione diuturna, quasi in naturam versum; hoc illa libavit, hoc didicit, hoc possedit; ita ut profectionem nostram, si de aliquo testimonio Scripturarum esset abortiva contentio ad illum iudicem pergeratur. Migne, ut sup., Tom. XXII, col. 1091.

<sup>1</sup> Jerome, in a letter to Asella, one of the members of the *Ecclesia Domestica*, in referring to this matter, writes: Lectio assiduitatem, assiduitas familiaritatem, familiaritatem fiduciam fecerat. Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXII, col. 481.

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austere monk for the welfare of his spiritual children and his ever fresh alacrity in revealing to them the treasures of Holy Writ and in sustaining them by his example and counsels in the heroic life upon which they had entered.

The deep and holy affection which Jerome entertained for the inmates of the Aventine convent is especially exhibited in his letters to them. In a communication to Eustochium he addresses her as "my Eustochium, my daughter, my mistress, my companion, my sister," and tells her "my age, your worth, our profession and our love of God, permit me to give you all these names."<sup>1</sup> This paternal affection of Jerome for his spiritual child grew with the passing years and continued uninterrupted until they were separated by death.

<sup>1</sup> *Mi Eustochium, filia, domna, conserva, germana, aliud enim ætatis, aliud meriti, aliud religionis, hoc charitatis est nomen.* Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXII, col. 411.

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While the inmates of the Aventine convent were thus enjoying so great happiness and were, under their earnest and saintly master, making such remarkable progress, not only in sacred science but also in spiritual perfection, an event occurred that had a far-reaching effect on the intellectual activities of the *Ecclesia Domestica*. This was the death of Pope Damasus. Public opinion declared Jerome to be the one who, both on account of his great learning and his exemplary life, was most worthy to succeed him. But the choice for the high office fell upon another.

Deprived of his patron and protector, and incessantly harassed by ruthless persecutors to whom his austere and saintly life was a standing reproach, and unable any longer to pursue, without continual interruption, his favorite Scriptural labors, Jerome again longed for the solitude and peace of the desert, which, in the midst of the perennial agi-

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tations of the Roman capital, he had never ceased to regret. He, accordingly, resolved to return to the East to those fountains of Biblical inspiration in which he had before quenched his thirst and near which he desired to fix his permanent abode.

Accompanied by his young brother, Paulinian, and a number of friends who likewise felt the lure of the desert, and a glorious *cortège* composed of the most eminent members of the Roman clergy and laity, and followed by the prayers and tears of Marcella and her friends, Paula and her children, Jerome proceeded to Ostia, where he embarked on a vessel that was setting sail for the East. Standing on shipboard, with his heart full of emotion which he made no effort to conceal, the voluntary exile gave a last, lingering look toward the home of the noble women whom he had left on the Aventine.

As he still had a few moments at his



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disposal before the ship's moorings were loosed, the sad and tender-hearted monk, with tears in his eyes, hastily wrote a letter—*raptim flens dolensque conscripsi* are his words—to the venerable Asella of the Church of the Household. In this communication he bade a fond adieu to those who had long been his joy and pride, most of whom he was never to see again. But in the mysterious designs of Providence a chosen few of these cherished and devoted friends were destined, in a retreat beyond the sea, to become his most beneficent inspirers and most efficient coworkers in a stupendous work which they were later to map out for him.

At the close of his letter to Asella, Jerome discloses, in the most touching words, the depth of his attachment for his spiritual family on the Aventine. "Salute," he bids Asella, "Paula and Eustochium, who, whether the world will it or not, are my very

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own; salute Albina, our mother, and Marcella, our sister.”<sup>1</sup>

And then, reproaching himself for ever having left his beloved solitude in the desert for the Babylon on the Tiber, with its corruption and turmoil, and impending dissolution, he exclaimed: “Fool that I was who, wishing to sing the canticle of the Lord in a strange land, abandoned Sinai for Egypt!” —*Stultus ego qui volebam cantare canticum Domini in terra aliena, et deserto monte Sina, Ægypti auxilium flagitabam.*<sup>2</sup>

But the persecutions to which the holy man was subjected by his enemies in Rome were not without happy results. For, once more returned to a grateful solitude, the pinions of his genius were trimmed for their loftiest flights and the venerable recluse was able to give to the world those matchless

<sup>1</sup> Saluta Paulam et Eustochium, velit nolit mundus, in Christo meas. Saluta matrem Albinam, sororemque Marcellam. Migne, ut sup., Tom. XXII, col. 484.

<sup>2</sup> Migne, op. cit., Tom XXII, col. 482.

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works on Holy Scripture which were, for all time, to be the glory of the Church and their author's most splendid title to undying fame.

It was only a few months after Jerome's departure for the East when the Appian Way saw passing towards Portus Romanus, at the mouth of the Tiber, a great troop of men and women belonging to the first patrician families of the Eternal City. Among them were many who were clad in the somber garb of widows and virgins consecrated to God. These were Paula and Eustochium and their companions, who were on their way to the sacred places of Palestine and Egypt.

Paula's decision to undertake this long journey was not the result of a sudden impulse. Some years before she had given hospitality to the venerable bishop, Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus. His accounts of the prodigies which he had witnessed among the Fathers of the desert made on her the same profound impression which some decades be-

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fore Marcella had experienced when listening to the stories of the patriarch, Anastasius, respecting the anchorets and cenobites of the Thebaid. From that time her mind loved to dwell on the lands which had been sanctified by the prayers and the penances of Paul and Anthony, Hilarion and Pachomius. Jerome's accounts of the Holy Land and the delights of a life of solitude had confirmed her in her desire to visit the lands of which she had heard such marvels. She was also greatly influenced by the fact that a friend of hers, Melania—also of a noble patrician family and of the same *gens* as herself—had, with a number of friends, many years previous, sought and found peace and happiness in the Thebaid, where they spent ten years. After this, Melania built a convent for herself and companions on the Mount of Olives, whence they wrote such glowing accounts of the delights of monastic life, away from the noise and perturbations of the

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world, that many were induced to follow their example.

After the death of her husband and of her cherished daughter, the brilliant Blesilla, Paula determined to flee from the distractions and commotions of Rome, and seek peace and tranquillity where it had been found by so many thousands of others—in the wilderness of Syria or Egypt.

The first objective of the travelers was Salamis in Cyprus, where Paula received a most cordial welcome from her venerated friend, Bishop Epiphanius, who had first inspired her with the idea of making a pilgrimage to the East. After a short visit here, the pilgrims continued their voyage and soon arrived at Antioch, where they were met by Jerome, their beloved friend and father.

So eager was Paula to see the holy places in Palestine, and to visit the monasteries in Egypt, about which she had heard so much through her friend, Melania, that she made

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preparations to continue, without delay, the rest of the journey by land. She induced Jerome to accompany the party, in order that all might profit by his knowledge of the places visited, and of the history and traditions in which the countries to be visited were so rich. They could not have had a better guide, or one more competent to make their pilgrimage interesting and profitable. Their journeyings in the Holy Land and Egypt, in both of which countries, under the guidance of Jerome, they investigated everything with the keen interest and thoroughness of trained Scriptural students, lasted a whole year. The Holy Land first engaged their attention, after which they went to the famed region of the Nile, the motherland of Christian monasticism. So fascinated was Paula with the lives of the anchorets whom she visited in their desert homes in Nitria and Arsinoë, that she wished to spend the remainder of her days in Egypt

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in a life of penance and contemplation. Jerome, however, was averse to this, and persuaded her to establish a home for herself and companions in Bethlehem, near the grotto of the Nativity. Returning, then, from Egypt to Bethlehem, Paula had four monasteries erected, three for women, over which she presided, and one for men, under the direction of Jerome.

## CHAPTER II

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PAULA and Eustochium, as well as their revered master, were at last in the land of the heart's desire. Far away from the luxury, the confusion, the exacting tyranny of worldly life, they experienced a peace, a liberty, a happiness they had never known before. For Paula and Eustochium, those noble ladies of the first house in the first city of the world, the contrast between their simple life in Bethlehem and that which they had been forced to live in the world's great capital was striking indeed. The silence, the solitude, the sweetness, they enjoyed in their new home filled their hearts with joy and rapture. At last they were free to devote themselves, without interruption, to their favorite study—Sacred Scripture—in what was to them the holiest place on earth.



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They lost no time in resuming those studies, which had been interrupted by their long voyage from Rome. While their monasteries were being built they begged Jerome to read with them, in Hebrew, the entire Bible from the beginning to the end, and explain all difficulties as they presented themselves. They had hitherto studied the Sacred Books according to their special attraction at the time, now one, now another. Jerome tried, but in vain, to decline this delicate and laborious task. But, as was ever the case in Rome, he was finally forced to yield to the entreaties of Paula and Eustochium. Writing of Paula many years afterwards, he says, "She compelled me to read, with explanations, the Old and the New Testament to her and her daughter." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compulit me ut vetus et novum Instrumentum, cum filia, me disserente, perlegeret. Quod propter verecundiam negans, propter assiduitatem tamen et crebras postulationes ejus praestiti, ut docerem quod didiceram. Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXII, col. 902.

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This reading of the Bible together excited in the two women a desire to make a still more profound study of each of the books of the Sacred Text—especially the Epistles of St. Paul. In searching for commentaries on the perplexing letters of the Apostle of the Gentiles they discovered that there was practically nothing in Latin, and that in Greek only Origen had written a few authorized tracts. Commentators had hitherto recoiled before the attempt to explain writings that bristled with such countless difficulties. Paula then begged Jerome to undertake an exegesis of the great apostle, but he shrank in terror from so gigantic a task. Unable to overcome his objections directly, Paula tried to secure by address what she so much desired. She accordingly besought him to interpret the short Epistle to Philemon, which consists of but a single chapter. In this wise Jerome found himself committed, in spite of himself, to the great work which the noble

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matron had so much at heart. For, after the exegesis of St. Paul was once begun, she would no longer accept any further excuses from the reluctant master, and thus she obtained one commentary after another on all the books of the Bible.

From the days when they were first thrilled by the learning and eloquence of the ascetic Dalmatian in the Church of the Household, Paula and Eustochium had been bound to their devoted master by the strongest ties of esteem and friendship. But it was not until after their arrival in Bethlehem that properly dates that holy and happy influence which these illustrious daughters of the Scipios began to exercise, in so pre-eminent a degree, over the genius and the labors of Jerome—an influence which persisted until their death, an influence which, as we shall see, ripened into the most abundant and beautiful fruitage.

Jerome—and shall we not say the same

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of Paula and Eustochium?—was at last fairly started on his great life-work—the work that has won for him the admiration and the gratitude of all succeeding ages. All that he had previously accomplished was but a preparation for the grand achievements that were to follow under the inspiration of the two peerless women who were always at his side to assist and encourage him in times of trial and difficulty.

It is now that his studies in Rome, his travels and researches in Gaul, Italy, Greece and Syria, Egypt and Palestine stood him in good stead, and enabled him to achieve what would otherwise have been impossible, and what would have been far beyond the strength and ability of any of his contemporaries. He had hitherto been sowing the seed. He was now to garner the harvest.

Jerome at this date was fifty-five years

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of age, in the zenith of his magnificent intellect, in the full vigor of a mind stored with the accumulated learning and wisdom of a life devoted to unremittent study and contemplation. But what was incomparably more to him and to the world, he had near him two extraordinarily gifted and sympathetic souls, who thoroughly understood him, and who knew how to direct his prodigious energy and stimulate his genius to the loftiest flights. Most of his work was undertaken at their instance and completed through their enthusiastic coöperation. Their wish was his pleasure; their request a command which he made haste to execute. This is evidenced everywhere in his letters, and especially in the prefaces to his many translations and commentaries.

On one occasion Paula desired to have a translation of Origen's commentaries on St. Luke for the use of the inmates of her convent. Although Jerome was then engaged

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in a work by which he set great store, he at once interrupted it in order to comply with Paula's desire. "You see," he writes her, "what weight a wish of yours has with me, for I have, without hesitation, discontinued my great work on 'Hebraic Questions' to assume, at your request, the dry and ungrateful rôle of translator."<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, when, in spite of his ardor, he seemed on the point of losing courage on account of the magnitude of the difficulties which confronted him, he was prevailed on by the incessant entreaties of Eustochium—*Quia tu, Eustochium, indesinenter, flagitas*—to complete one of the great works which had been begun at the request of herself and her mother. On still another occasion he was

<sup>1</sup> Perspicitis enim, quantum apud me et auctoritas vestra, et voluntas valet Praetermisi paululum "Hebraicarum Quaestionum" libros, ut ad arbitrium vestrum lucrativis operis haec, qualiacunque sunt, non mea, sed aliena dictarem. Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXVI, cols. 229, 230.

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on the point of leaving a peculiarly difficult task unfinished, but after listening to Paula's arguments against such a proceeding, he ended by gratifying her wish, remarking, "*Obsequar igitur voluntati tuæ*"—I shall submit to your will.

But not only were Paula and Eustochium the stimulus of Jerome's great labors in translation and exegesis, but they were also his consolation and support when he was made the target of hostile criticism and personal animosity. Shortly after his arrival in Bethlehem, he had located his study in a grotto adjoining the cave of the Nativity. This grotto, so near the birthplace of the Redeemer, he called his paradise. In this grateful retreat, surrounded by his precious library, he fondly hoped to enjoy uninterrupted study and tranquillity. But the peace-loving solitary was doomed to disappointment. For no sooner had the fruits of his literary activity begun to be distributed

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in the West than his enemies began their attacks. They accused him of making his translations of the Sacred Text the means of disseminating false doctrine, and of announcing in his commentaries many views that were at variance with the accepted teachings of the Church.

These attacks, which so cruelly impugned the orthodoxy of the sensitive monk, cut him to the quick. "If my occupation," he cried, "had been to plait rush baskets, or to weave mats out of palm leaves, in order, by the sweat of my brow, to gain my daily bread, envy would have spared me. But since, in obedience to the precepts of the Savior, I have, for the good of souls, chosen to prepare the bread which perishes not and have wished to clear the path of truth of the weeds which ignorance has sown in it, I am accused of a twofold crime. If I correct errors in the Sacred Text, I am denounced as a falsifier; if I do not correct them, I



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am pilloried as a disseminator of error.”<sup>1</sup>

It was during these trying hours, when persecution was most fierce and relentless, that Jerome most needed the sympathy and the support of his two learned and saintly friends and collaborators. “I beg you, I conjure you, dear servants of Christ,” he writes in the preface to the Book of Kings, “to protect me by your prayers against the rage of those dogs which run through the city, barking, calumniating, sharpening their teeth in order the better to bite. Protect me from those ignoramuses whose knowledge consists in disparaging that of others. Defend me from their attacks, for you are my shield.”<sup>2</sup> Aided by your prayers, venerable

<sup>1</sup> “Præfatio in Librum Job.” Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXIX, col. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Sed et vos famulas Christi rogo . . . ut contra latrantes canes, qui adversum me rabido ore desæviunt, et circumeunt civitatem, atque in eo se doctos arbitrantur, si aliis detrahant, orationum clypeos apponatis. Migne, ut sup., Tom. XXVIII, col. 604.

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servants of Christ, Paula and Eustochium, I can sing in the blessed land of Judea a canticle I was unable to sing in the city of the fratricidal Romulus."

After Paula and Eustochium had persuaded Jerome to write commentaries on the twelve minor prophets, they wished him to take up the interpretation of the four major prophets, Isaias, Jeremias, Ezechiel and Daniel. Appalled at the thought of so colossal a task, the diffident monk endeavored to escape from it. "The ocean of these prophets," declared he, "is so great and so mysterious. It would be better to observe silence regarding it than not to discuss it adequately." "No," insisted Paula and Eustochium, "it is better to say something than nothing at all." And, strengthened in their purpose by what they had already induced him to accomplish, and having in mind his own glory, they added with the grace and elegant address of sweetest friendship, "Is

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not a small blemish sufficient to deform a beautiful face? You have begun a monumental work. Can you leave it imperfect and unfinished?" As in all other cases, the peerless champion of the faith ended by acceding to the wish of his two insistent associates. "Since, then, you must have what you ask, I yield to your demand." Thus, under the incentive of these pious women, the old solitary felt a renewal of his youthful ardor and was moved by a noble love of that glory which his two friends always desired to see crown his labors.

Paula and Eustochium were thus not only the inspirers of Jerome but also his guardian angels. They were ever at his side, assisting and encouraging him in his Herculean labors; sustaining and cheering him in the hour of persecution and combat. Without their aid and sympathy, he would, probably, have succumbed more than a score of times. But when the assaults against him were

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most ruthless, he always found in them renewed energy and unceasing joy. They were made to love him, to admire him, to serve him in this world as an act of religion. They saw in this their glory and they contributed much to that of their friend and father.

A strange symptom was then manifested of the revolution which was then renovating Roman society from its very foundations. One of the great names of the world's capital had just attached itself to the plebeian name of a Dalmatian priest in a corner of conquered Judea, and received from it an immortality which has not paled beside the most famous events of Carthage and Numantia. Jerome has identified with works as durable as Christianity itself, of which they are one of the glories, the name and the memory of the two daughters of Scipio. Their learning, their virtue, their sweetness, their filial devotion to the great Doctor of the

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West, inscribed on the frontispiece of our Sacred Books, are known and celebrated even in lands where the history of Rome is unknown, and where, perhaps, it will never penetrate. Jerome hoped for this, and they had no doubt of it. And in the sacred friendship which bound them to him they found their sweetest pleasure on earth and saw in it, too, an earnest of eternal happiness in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

The intellectual activity of Jerome, while working under the inspiration of his two incomparable friends, was marvelous, and the amount of work which he accomplished under their benign influence, and with their efficient coöperation, was enormous. There were commentaries on both the Old and New Testaments, translations from the noted Greek Doctors, and letters innumerable to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Amédée Thierry, "Saint Jérôme, *La Société Chrétienne à Rome et l'Émigration Romaine en Terre Sainte*," Tom. I, p. 327, Paris, 1867.

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all points of the compass. For, from all parts of the Roman Empire, Jerome was appealed to as an oracle on all matters pertaining to Scripture, or to traditions and doctrines based on Scripture.

Never were the oracles of Delphi and Jupiter Ammon consulted by so many people and from so distant parts of the world. Letters and messengers came to Jerome in ever increasing numbers—from clergy and laity as well—from his faithful friend Marcella and other members of the Church of the Household; from Augustine, the illustrious Bishop of Hippo; from the daughters of Druid priests in far-off Gaul.

Besides all this he found himself engaged in frequent controversies concerning the teachings of Origen and Pelagius and numerous others whose doctrines were open to suspicion or were manifestly heterodox. It was, indeed, a marvel that one man, who was most of the time in delicate health, could

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accomplish so much and that, too, of so recondite and important a character.

Like Origen, Jerome joined to his immense knowledge an extraordinary capacity for work. And like his illustrious predecessor, he contrived to carry on his incessant labors with very little sleep. His Biblical and controversial works were usually written during the daytime. His correspondence he reserved for the night, when a small lamp in his grotto frequently showed that he continued his vigils until the early hours of the morning. So indefatigable was Origen that he was known as *Chalceutes*—man of bronze—and *Adamantinus*—heart of diamond. These same epithets could with equal truth have been applied to the indefatigable anchorite of Bethlehem.

But Paula and Eustochium saw to it that the numerous interruptions incident to Jerome's wide range of correspondence and to his numerous controversies did not interfere

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with their plans for an undertaking on which they had so long set their hearts—a work which was to be the culmination of the master's achievements. This was nothing less than a complete Latin version of the Old Testament from the Hebrew original. All the previous labors of the tireless recluse, before the inception of this colossal task, had paved the way for this supreme effort, and nothing, after the task was actually begun, was permitted for long to retard its progress or to militate against its ultimate termination.

Shortly after the completion of the monasteries in Bethlehem, which were to be the homes of the large Roman contingent, Jerome, at the urgent request of Paula, had made, partly from the Septuagint and partly from the old Italic version, what was practically a new translation of the Bible. But this great work, which, unfortunately, has been almost entirely lost, was but the prelude



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to the more difficult and more important translation from the Hebrew.

In the opinion of most people, this monumental work was wholly and solely the work of one man—the famous Father and Doctor of the Church, St. Jerome. In a certain sense this opinion is well founded; in another it is entirely erroneous. Most of the actual work of translation, it is true, was performed by St. Jerome, but, had it not been for three Roman women of noblest patrician birth, it is safe to say that the Vulgate, as we now know it, would never have been completed, and probably never been begun.

The story of this prodigious undertaking reads more like a romance than veritable history. It is the story of genius overcoming untold difficulties, of energy and perseverance in the face of the seemingly impossible. But it is, above all, a story of the value of woman's coöperation in a noble cause, of the far-reaching effects of woman's influence in

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something that is, at first blush, without her proper sphere of action. Indeed, it may safely be said that we have not in all history a more extraordinary instance of the paramount importance of woman's collaboration in things of the mind, or of the efficacy of her benign influence, when guided by affectionate zeal and by keen and lofty intelligence, than in the production of the Vulgate. It is above all a story of surpassing interest for people of our own time, when opinions respecting the higher education of women are so divided, and when discussions about the proper sphere of woman's activity are so animated and so contradictory.

M. Ozanam does not hesitate to declare that this version of the Bible from the original text was one of the most daring, as well as one of the greatest, projects ever conceived.<sup>1</sup> It was, also, one of the most im-

<sup>1</sup> "La Civilisation au Cinquième Siècle," Tom. II, p. 126, Paris, 1894.

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portant to the Western or Latin Church, for as yet it had no direct translation from the Hebrew, while the Greek Church had no less than three, besides the Septuagint. The old Italic version, as well as Jerome's revision of it, and, also, the version from the Septuagint, were nothing more than translations of a translation. The time had come, however, when a Latin version from the original Hebrew was an imperative necessity. Jerome, with his vast encyclopedic knowledge, was the only man who was then sufficiently versed in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Chaldaic to attempt such a work. But no one realized more clearly than he did the magnitude of such a bold and difficult enterprise. Nevertheless, stimulated and encouraged by Paula and Eustochium, he set himself to work with his usual energy, and with all the ardor of one in the bloomy flush of early manhood.

This is not the place to recount the part

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which Paula and Eustochium had in this huge undertaking, but it can be truthfully said that its history is intimately woven with their own history, and that the great fecundity of their lives in Bethlehem, or rather their providential mission in the Church, is exhibited at its best in Jerome's version of the Bible, long known as the Vulgate.

When Jerome began actual work on his *opus maximum* he was in his sixtieth year—an age when, according to certain modern physicians and pseudo-economists, one should be retired from the sphere of active life. He was also in precarious health, but his intellect was as clear and his mind as active and as vigorous as ever. But neither weight of years nor impaired health could restrain his impetuous nature, or render him less eager to comply with the wishes of his perfervid friends, respecting a work before which any other man of his age and infirmi-

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ties would have recoiled as before the impossible.

The version of the Hebrew was not made in the usual sequence of the Sacred Books, beginning with the first and ending with the last, but according to the demands of the polemic of the time, or the expressed preferences of Paula and others, to whose wishes the gracious translator cheerfully deferred.

The part of the Bible first translated was the First Book of Kings. No sooner had he completed this portion of his work than Jerome submitted it to Paula and Eustochium for their criticism and revision. "Read my Book of Kings," he writes . . . "Read also the Latin and Greek editions and compare them with my version."

At other times, so great was his confidence in their knowledge and judgment that he desired to have his own authority corroborated by that of his unrivaled coworkers. Thus, in his preface to the translation of

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the Book of Esther, he writes, "You, Paula and Eustochium, who are so thoroughly versed in the literature of the Hebrews and so competent to judge of the merits of a translation, examine my version of Esther, comparing it word for word with the original, in order to determine whether I have in any way changed the sense of the original, and whether I have fully preserved in Latin the true spirit of the Hebrew narrative."<sup>1</sup>

And they did read and compare and criticize. And more than this, they frequently suggested modifications and corrections, which the great man accepted with touching humility and incorporated in a revised copy.

<sup>1</sup> Vos autem, O Paula et Eustochium, quoniam et bibliothecas Hebræorum studuistis entrare, et interpretum certamina comprobatis, tenentes Esther Hebraicum librum, per singula verba nostram translationem aspicite, ut possitis agnoscere me nihil etiam augmentasse addendo, sed fideli testimonio simpliciter sicut in hebræo habetur, historiam hebraicam Latine linguæ tradisse. Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXVIII, cols. 1504, 1505.

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It may, indeed, be confidently asserted that no two persons since their time have more thoroughly and more lovingly studied and compared the Latin, Greek and Hebrew texts of the Scriptures, or have more completely made this occupation the work of their lives, than did Paula and Eustochium. Paula, Jerome informs us, knew the Holy Scripture by heart—*Scripturas Sanctas tenebat memoriter*. And it would be difficult to name any other two persons who possessed a greater mastery of the three languages required, all of which they spoke with the greatest fluency and precision. Paula, Jerome assures us, knew Hebrew so well that she spoke it without the slightest trace of Latin accent—*sermonem absque ulla Latinæ linguæ proprietate personaret*. And Eustochium, also, who was no less gifted than her mother, spoke this language equally well. We can realize how exceptional, among the great scholars of the time, were

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their attainments as linguists, when we remember that their eminent contemporary, St. Augustine, who devoted so much of his life to the study and interpretation of Scripture, was far from being proficient in Greek and knew practically nothing of Hebrew.

But the service which Paula and Eustochium rendered to the venerable hermit was not limited to their criticism, advice and encouragement, to which he attached so much importance, and on which he so greatly relied for the perfection of his work. Far from it. It was Paula who, at her own expense, procured for him the books and rare manuscripts which were essential to the successful execution of his work. This was no small assistance, for in those days the books and manuscripts that Jerome most needed—like Origen's "Hexapla" for instance—were exceedingly rare, and were worth their weight in gold.

Yet more. Much as has already been said



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of the share of these noble women in the great scholar's translations and commentaries, the most remarkable fact—a fact almost unknown—remains to be told. Under Jerome's direction, they undertook the delicate and important work of copying and revising Biblical manuscripts, in which they were aided by the inmates of Paula's convent. This was particularly true in the case of the Psalms, for, wonderful to relate, the Psalter which has been adopted in our Vulgate is not a translation made by Jerome from the Hebrew, but a corrected version of the Septuagint, due, in great measure, to Paula and Eustochium.

Amédée Thierry, a distinguished member of the French Academy, referring to the fruitful labors of Jerome's illustrious friends and *collaboratrices*, writes:

“One loves to picture them seated before a large table on which are spread numerous manuscripts in Greek, Hebrew and Latin;

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here the Hebrew text of the Bible, there the different editions of the Septuagint, of the 'Hexapla' of Origen, of the versions of Theodotian, Symmacus, Aquila, and lastly the Italic Vulgate; to observe these learned women controlling, comparing, copying with their own hands—and with piety and joy—this Psalter . . . which we still chant, at least in great part, in the Latin Church to-day. The mind is then involuntarily carried back to their palaces in Rome, their ceilings of marble and gold, the army of eunuchs, servants and clients, and to their life there, surrounded with all the delicacies of fortune and all the pomps of rank. Like Mary, the sister of Martha, they believed they had chosen the better part, and they rejoiced thereat in all the fullness of their hearts.”<sup>1</sup>

It was, thus, in Paula's convents, which were likewise schools of theology and languages, where every one of her *religieuses*

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., Tom. I, p. 331.

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was obliged to study Scripture, that was originated that important occupation of copying manuscripts, which became a universal practice in all the monasteries of succeeding ages—an occupation to which we are indebted for the preservation of the treasures of Greek and Roman letters and science, as well as of the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and an occupation which, when we consider what it has saved for us, was probably one of the most useful which was ever instituted.

The mind dwells with pleasure on the work accomplished during medieval times in the scriptoriums of the Benedictines, Franciscans and Dominicans, and in those presided over by Hroswitha, St. Hildegarde, and the Princess-Abbess of Whitby, St. Hilda, the inspirer and patroness of Caedmon who was the precursor, by a thousand years, of the author of "Paradise Lost." But when recalling what we owe to these noble insti-

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tutions, let us not forget that the origin and exemplar of all of them was the one that owed its existence to Paula and Eustochium in their famous convent schools in Bethlehem.

So highly did Jerome value the assistance given him by his two devoted collaborators that he dedicated many of his works to them. Others he inscribed to his former associates of the *Ecclesia Domestica*, who not only kept up a constant correspondence with their friends in Bethlehem but also exhibited an unabated interest in the study of Scripture as well as in the labors of their former teacher, in whose achievements they gloried almost as much as did Paula and Eustochium.

The Pharisees of the time, not content with reproaching the venerable Father with his persistence in dedicating his books to his spiritual daughters, went so far as to denounce it as a public scandal. His reply to

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his accusers, in his preface to the commentary on Sophonias, reveals the character of the man and his nobility of soul so well that I reproduce from it the following paragraph:

“There are people, O Paula and Eustochium, who take offense at seeing your names at the beginning of my works. These people do not know that Olda prophesied when the men were mute; that, while Barak trembled, Deborah saved Israel; that Judith and Esther delivered from supreme peril the children of God. I pass over in silence Anna and Elizabeth and the other holy women of the Gospel, but humble stars when compared with the luminary, Mary. Shall I speak now of the illustrious women among the heathen? Does not Plato have Aspasia speak in his dialogues? Does not Sappho hold the lyre at the same time as Alcæus and Pindar? Did not Themista philosophize with the sages of Greece? And the mother

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of the Gracchi, your Cornelia, and the daughter of Cato, wife of Brutus, before whom pale the austere virtue of the father and the courage of the husband—are they not the pride of the whole of Rome? I shall add but one word more. Was it not to women that our Lord appeared after His resurrection? Yes, and the men could then blush for not having sought what women had found.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the benefit of those of my readers who are familiar with Latin I give this noble passage in full:

Antequam Sophoniam aggrediar, qui nonus est in ordine duodecim prophetarum, respondendum videtur his qui me irridendum æstimant, quod omissis viris, ad vos scribam potissimum, O Paula et Eustochium. Qui, si scirent Oldam, viris tacentibus, prophetasse, et Deboraham iudicem pariter propheten, hostes Israel, Barac timente, superasse: et Iudith et Esther, in typo Ecclesiæ, et occidisse adversarios, et periturum Israel de periculo liberasse: nunquam post tergum meum manum curvarent in ciconiam. Taceo de Anna et Elizabeth, et cæteris sanctis mulieribus, quarum velut siderum igniculos, clarum Mariæ lumen abscondit. Ad gentiles feminas veniam, ut et apud sæculi philosophos videant animorum differentias quæri solere, non cor-

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Could any modern champion of woman be more eloquent and more chivalrous than this roused anchoret of Bethlehem?

Paula did not live to see the completion of the version of the Bible from the Hebrew, of which she had been the chief inspirer and promoter. Little, however, remained to be done after her death. All had been trans-

porum. Plato inducit Aspasiā disputantem: Sappho cum Pindaro scribitur, et Alcæo: Themista inter sapientissimos Græciæ philosophatur: Corneliam Gracchorum, id est, vestram, tota Romanæ urbis turba miratur: Carneades eloquentissimus philosophorum, acutissimus rhetorum, qui apud consulares viros et in Academia plausus excitare consueverat, 673-674 non erubuit in privata domo, audiente matrona, de philosophia disputare. Quid referam Catonis filiam, Bruti coniugem, cuius virtus facit ne patris maritique constantiam tantopere miremur? Plena est historia tam Græca quam Latina virtutibus feminarum, et quæ integros libros flagitent. Mihi tantum, quia aliud operis incumbit, in fine prologi dixisse sufficiat, Dominum resurgentem primum apparuisse mulieribus, et apostolorum illas fuisse apostolas, ut erubescerent viri non quærere, quem iam fragilior sexus invenerat. Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXV, cols. 1337, 1338.

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lated except the Books of Josue, Judges and Ruth. These Jerome, although almost crushed by the loss of one who had been his consolation and support in countless trials and difficulties and persecutions, hastened, under the gentle but unceasing stimulation of Eustochium, to bring to a happy termination. When, finally, the last page was finished, he placed these three books on the tomb, as it were, of his sainted friend, as a pious tribute to her memory. "Now," he writes in the preface to these three books, "that the blessed and venerable Paula, whose life was an exemplar of virtue, has slept in the Lord, I have not been able to refuse Eustochium, virgin of Christ, these books which I promised to her mother." <sup>1</sup>

Thus, then, after fifteen years of the most strenuous toil, was finally completed, about the year 405, this first and unique version of the Scriptures from the Hebrew into Latin

<sup>1</sup> Migne, *op. cit.*, Tom. XXVIII, col. 506.



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—a version which, under the name of the Vulgate, was adopted by the Council of Trent as the authorized version for the entire Church. It was a marvelous achievement, which, all things considered, is without a parallel in the annals of scholarship.

When Johnson's dictionary was published, "the world," Boswell informs us, "contemplated with wonder so stupendous a work achieved by one man, while other countries had thought such undertakings fit only for whole academies." The statement is no doubt warranted, but with how much greater truth could it be made of the Vulgate—a work involving incomparably more preparation and labor, and requiring much greater equipment and a much higher order of genius!

The English Authorized Version of the Bible was the joint work of six committees, composed of forty-seven of the most eminent scholars of England, who labored nearly five

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years on a translation which was, in reality, little more than a revision of previous versions. Compared with the translation of Jerome, a noted Scriptural authority in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* writes: "It [the Authorized Version, whose genealogy is to be traced up in a direct line through every stage of Biblical revision to the Latin Vulgate] stands preëminent for its accurate representation of the original Hebrew and Greek, and may challenge favorable comparison in this respect . . . with the Latin Vulgate." Could more be said of the transcendent excellence of Jerome's work, or give a clearer idea of its magnitude than these two statements? But the translator of the Vulgate had the supreme advantage of laboring under the benign influence of a twin star—Paula and Eustochium—the most brilliant luminary of the kind that ever appeared in the ecclesiastical firmament during the course of the Church's history.

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Jerome was seventy-five years of age when the Vulgate was given to the world. His labors, however, were not yet terminated. He had promised Paula, during her life, to write commentaries on all the Prophets. Although a part of this task had been completed, the most difficult portion of it still remained untouched. But the weight of years, failing eyesight, and broken health did not deter him from fulfilling a promise made long years before. With the assistance of Eustochium, who was always near him to sweeten his task and alleviate his sufferings, he labored on with amazing ardor. Paula in the tomb still animated him no less than when she was alive, and unceasingly acted as his inspiring guardian angel. Under the magic of her name and ever-persisting influence, under the spell of her sweet and fondly cherished memory, his indomitable energy never flagged, and his wonted activity never abated.

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Paula had dreamed of a monument of exegesis in which should be embalmed all the knowledge accumulated by the venerable solitary during his long and busy life; a monument that should forever endure to the glory of the Church and to his own glory. "And shall this monument," queried, with anxious mien, the gentle, ardent Eustochium, "remain unfinished?" "No," exclaimed, in the language of Virgil, the high-minded old man, "*dum spiritus hos regit artus*"—while the breath of life remains—I shall remain faithful to my promise.

The day was not long enough for him, so, by the aid of the flickering light of a small lamp, he continued his labors far into the night. Finally, enfeebled by his great age, his eyes refused to serve him any longer, and he was unable to decipher his Hebrew manuscripts without the aid of some of his brethren in the monastery. They read to him the exegetists he could no longer read him-

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self, and he dictated to them his commentaries. At last, when in his eightieth year, his task was finished, and he was able to say to Eustochium who, after her mother's death, had been his unfailing support and comforter: "You force me, O virgin of Christ, Eustochium, to pay you the debt which I owed to your sainted mother while she was yet living.<sup>1</sup> My affection for her is not greater than that which I have for you. But you are present; in obeying you, I acquit myself of the debt I have owed both of you." The picture of the toilworn and heroic octogenarian handing this final volume to Eustochium, Paula's heiress and executrix, and thus acquitting himself of what he considered the most sacred of obligations, is one of the most touching spectacles in the history of letters and sanctity.

<sup>1</sup> Cogis mi, virgo Christi, Eustochium, quod sanctæ matri tuæ Paulæ, dum viveret, pollicitus sum, tibi redere. Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXIV, col. 17.

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Shortly after seeing all of Paula's dreams realized and her own as well, the gentle, ardent, gifted Eustochium, the first of patrician maidens to make the vow of virginity, followed her mother to another world. Jerome's only consolation, after her death, was the granddaughter of Paula, who, some years previously, had come from Rome and who, like her aunt and grandmother, had the ineffable happiness of studying Scripture under the same master who, nearly forty years before, had inaugurated a course of Bible study in the *Ecclesia Domestica* on the Aventine, and who had there, under the inspiration of those who were nearest and dearest to her, as well as to him, begun that brilliant career which issued in his being ranked among the most eminent Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

Young Paula, who was now a maiden of twenty years, and had inherited all the rare qualities of mind and heart, which so dis-

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tinguished the other members of her family, was the light and life of the noble and venerated patriarch during the year in which he survived the death of his devoted daughter in Christ, Eustochium. And when the end came, after his long and faithful service in the cause of Biblical science, it was young Paula who closed his eyes in death, and who had his precious remains laid away near the grotto of the Nativity, not far from those of the two exalted souls

In goodness and power præëminent,

who, for more than a third of a century, had watched over him with the most tender solicitude, and who, by developing to the utmost all the resources of his matchless intellect, had converted the retiring and diffident monk of Chalcis into the brightest luminary in Christendom.

The last years of Jerome and his saintly inspirers were saddened by many bereave-

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ments which followed one another in rapid succession. Among these were the deaths, in Rome, of several members of the family of Paula and Eustochium. There were also the deaths of numerous inmates of the convent on the Aventine. Chief among them was Marcella—the foundress of the convent—who, although far away from Bethlehem, had always kept up a regular correspondence with her cherished friends, Paula and her daughter, and her venerated teacher of happier days, Jerome.

But the greatest affliction of the devoted trio was to witness the agony of the august Roman Empire. Its dissolution had long been imminent, but no one was prepared for the final catastrophe. And still less was anyone prepared to see Rome—the capital of the world—fall into the hands of the barbarians from the North. Its inhabitants fondly imagined that the great city of the Caesars was specially protected by a kind of inviolable



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majesty and that it was destined to endure for all time. But Alaric finally gained possession of the queen of the world and turned the ill-fated city over to his brutal soldiery who, for three days, knew no law but that of fire and sword.

When the story of these atrocities reached Bethlehem, Jerome was prostrated with grief. In lamentations worthy of Jeremias, he exclaimed: "The light of the world is extinguished; the Roman Empire is decapitated; in the fall of a single city the universe collapses. . . . Who would have believed that Rome, the proud sovereign of the nations, enriched by the spoils of the entire world, could become the sepulcher of its own people and that her sons would become fugitives and slaves on all the shores of the East, of Egypt and Africa? Who would have imagined that Bethlehem would one day receive as mendicants the most illustrious families of the Eternal City? We

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cannot give assistance to all of them; but we give them at least our tears, and we weep with them"—*quibus, quoniam opem ferre non possumus, condolemus, et lacrymas lacrymis jungimus.*<sup>1</sup>

Jerome is usually characterized as a man who was of an exceedingly stern and austere nature. He was, indeed, an implacable foe to idleness, frivolity and luxury, but, although he was austere in his own manner of living, in his dealings with others he was always kind, indulgent and affectionate. In his celebrated letter to his friend, Heliodorus, appealing to him to join him in a monastic life in the desert of Chalcis, he declares, "I have not a heart of iron or bowels without feeling, neither have I been born of a rock, nor have I been suckled by a Hyrcanian tigress."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXV, cols. 16 and 75.

<sup>2</sup> Non nobis est ferreum pectus, nec dura præcordia; non ex silice natos Hyrcanæ nutrire tigrides. Migne, op. cit., Tom. XXII, col. 348.

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The foregoing pages regarding his relations towards his friends and pupils in Rome and Bethlehem exhibit him in a different light. He may not have been of the effusive and demonstrative disposition of his illustrious friend and contemporary, St. Augustine, as portrayed in Ary Scheffer's splendid painting of St. Monica and her son, but he was, nevertheless, a man of a deeply affectionate nature, of rare generosity and nobility of soul, and, above all, a man of unswerving loyalty to his friends.

No man, probably, was ever so completely under the sublime inspiration of "the eternal womanly" as was this exemplar of penance and mortification. From the time he came under the potent influence of Marcella and her gifted friends in the convent on the Aventine, until, when on the verge of the tomb, he gave young Paula her last lesson in Scripture, it was this inspiring force that kept him on the highest plane of intellectual

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effort. Above all, the spectacle of the sublime virtues of Paula and Eustochium, especially during the last trying years of their lives, afforded him repose, and enabled him, far away from scenes of incessant strife, to mount to the serene regions of spiritual peace and joy. For this reason, he never speaks of these two admirable women except with veneration—a veneration which was more profound for Paula and more paternal for Eustochium—a veneration, too, which was always full of a humility in which he forgets absolutely the part that is his in the virtues before which he bows in reverence. He continually repeats: “The saintly, the venerable Paula”; “Eustochium, the flower of virgins,” “the pearl of solitude.” In his letters to his correspondents in Rome, Spain, Gaul, Africa, he loves to dilate on the sanctity of his two illustrious associates. For the father of their souls whose great merits they knew so well, for the eminent Doctor who, while

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illuminating the entire Church, shared with them so generously his vast treasures of learning, Paula and Eustochium always entertained the deepest reverence and affection. Their confidence in him was as full of respect as their filial gratitude toward him was touching and sincere. They were inexpressibly happy in having found so excellent a spiritual guide and so inexhaustible a fountain of all knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

From this holy union of hearts and souls, it would be difficult to decide who derived the most benefit—the pious and learned Paula, the devoted and ecstatic Eustochium, or the zealous and erudite Jerome, who, thanks to the sympathy and coöperation of his two incomparable friends, was able to produce those monumental works which will ever constitute his chief glory in the Church which he served so long and so well.

<sup>1</sup> M. l'Abbé F. Lagrange, "Histoire de Sainte Paule," pp. 412-413, Paris, 1883.

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We admire "the eternal womanly" in Aspasia, who was the inspiration of the most brilliant geniuses of Attica in the golden age of Greece; we admire it in St. Hilda, who unsealed the lips of Caedmon and made him the first of English bards; we admire it in St. Clare, who sustained St. Francis, the *poverello* of Assisi, in his great, world-embracing work of charity and reform; we admire it in Beatrice, the sovereign influence in the production of Dante's immortal "Divina Commedia"; we admire it in Vittoria Colonna, who stimulated Michelangelo in his sublimest conceptions; we admire it in the relations between Frankish and Saxon nuns and learned scholars and saintly ecclesiastics—between the poet Fortunatus and Saint Radegunda; between Alcuin and the daughters of Charlemagne; between St. Lioba and St. Boniface. But in none of these inspirers of great and holy things do we find that long-continued, ever-present, all-dominat-

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ing, supremely effective power of “the eternal womanly” that so distinguished Paula and Eustochium, and which has forever identified them with Jerome’s masterpiece, the Vulgate.

Dante, at the conclusion of his “New Life,” in referring to his great work—the “Divina Commedia,” which he then had in contemplation—writes concerning Beatrice, the lady of his heart, “I hope to say of her what was never said of any woman.” Jerome, in addressing his last farewell to Paula, in his famous funeral eulogy, expresses himself to the same effect, but in a different manner. In words broken by sobs and tears, the grief-stricken patriarch exclaims, “*Vade, O Paula*”—Adieu, Paula—“sustain by thy prayers the declining years of him who has held thee in such veneration and affection. Thy faith and thy works unite thee to Christ. In His presence thy petitions will readily be granted.” Then,

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recalling his life-work, a work which he is always pleased to regard as her work as well as his own, he is comforted in his deep affliction, for he feels that her memory will endure as long as men shall be moved by the deeds of heroic lives or stirred by the records of preëminent merit and achievement. And giving a beautiful turn to a well-known sentiment of Horace and Ovid, he rejoices even in his sorrow, for he can say in the language of solemn prophecy, "*Exegi monumentum tuum ære perennius, quod nulla destruere possit vetustas*"—I have raised to thee a monument more durable than bronze, which time shall never destroy.

What a wonderful prophecy! And what a marvelous fulfillment of it has been witnessed during the ages which have elapsed since these words were pronounced! Paula's monument was Jerome's life-work—his letters, his doctrinal treatises, his commen-



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taries, but above all, his Latin version of the Hebrew Scriptures—the Vulgate. And what a unique monument it was and will ever be!

All the Anglo-Saxon translations, not to speak of others, were made from it, as was also the English version of Wyclif, while its influence on Tyndale's and subsequent English versions was most profound. It was the first book to come from the press of Gutenberg; a copy of this edition is the most prized volume in the world today. But a still more signal honor awaited it, for it was decreed by the Council of Trent that "the old and Vulgate edition," approved "by the usage of so many ages," should be the only Latin version used in "public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions." And so far-reaching has been its influence through the centuries that the religious terminology of the languages of Western Europe has, in great part,

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been derived from or colored by the Vulgate.

Nor is this all. As is well known, most of the modern languages of Europe have been formed under the influence of, and as the result of, the fecundity of the ancient Latin. But the Latin from which these languages have been fashioned was not the language of Cicero, nor of Virgil, popular as they were during the Middle Ages, but the language of the Church and of the Bible—the language of the Vulgate—which was created by Jerome acting under the inspiration of Paula and Eustochium. It is the Vulgate which was the first book of which the nascent languages of medieval times essayed a translation, the first book of which an attempt at translation was made in the German of the eighth century and in the French of the twelfth century. It is the Vulgate, with its admirable narratives, with the fascinating simplicity of Genesis,

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with its charming pictures of the infancy of the human race, that supplied the needed language in which to address the barbarians from the North when they first came under the beneficent influence of Christian civilization.

Our fathers were wont to cover the Vulgate with gold and precious stones. And they did more. Whenever a council of the Church was convened, the Sacred Scripture—that is, the Vulgate—was placed upon the altar in the midst of the assembly which it, in a certain sense, dominated, while, on the occasions of great and imposing outdoor processions, the Bible was carried in triumph in a golden reliquary.

“Our ancestors,” declares Ozanam, “had good reason to carry the Bible in triumph and to cover it with gold. For this first of ancient books is,” as he truly observes, “also the first of modern books, because from its pages have sprung all the languages, all the

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eloquence, all the civilization of the later centuries.”<sup>1</sup>

St. Jerome was right. The monument he erected to Paula, or rather to Paula and Eustochium—for mother and daughter may not be separated—is imperishable. And the glory of their work, far from diminishing with the passing ages, becomes, on the contrary, greater as the world grows older and wiser. Who, then, that has read the story of the labors of the Dalmatian monk, and of the heiresses of the Scipios and the Gracchi, can any longer question the supreme importance of woman's influence in every sphere of human endeavor, or seriously contend that inspiration, of the kind noted in

<sup>1</sup> Nos ancêtres avaient raison de porter la Bible en triomphe et de la couvrir d'or; ce premier des livres anciens est aussi le premier des livres modernes; il est, pour ainsi dire, l'auteur de ces livres mêmes, car de ses pages devaient sortir toutes les langues, toute l'éloquence, toute la poésie et toute la civilisation des temps nouveaux. "La Civilisation au Cinquième Siècle," Tom. II, p. 148.

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the preceding pages, is of lesser moment than achievement? And who can fail to see that Goethe expressed a profound and beautiful truth when, in the closing verses of "Faust," he declared it is "the eternal womanly that leads us on"—

Das Ewig-Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan.

The life of Jerome, so strange and, withal, so dramatic and so fascinating, gave rise, at an early age, to many legends of rarest interest. According to certain hagiographs, no spot in Judea witnessed a greater number of miracles than the last resting place of the saintly doctor of Bethlehem. The fame of his amazing knowledge of Holy Scripture made him a kind of initiator of souls to things divine in the life beyond the tomb, a rôle which Dante, with less reason, attributed to Virgil. We are assured that three persons, who had died while invoking the

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name of Jerome, and who had expressed the wish that their dead bodies should be placed on the sackcloth which he had used, were restored to life and reported that the holy monk had guided their souls through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, explaining to them the while the mysteries of the supernatural world, the ineffable felicity of the elect and the terrible lot of the damned.

The Middle Ages, which admired asceticism only as it was painted in the lives of the fathers of the Thebaid, replaced the gracious figures of Paula and Eustochium in the hermitage of Bethlehem by that of a lion, which was at first a protégé of Jerome, and afterwards his protector and grateful servant. According to a biography of the saint, which had a great vogue during the ninth and tenth centuries, the venerable solitary one day saw a huge lion, with a wounded paw, enter his grotto. Taking compassion on the suffering brute, the saint miracu-

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lously cured him. Then, so runs the legend, the grateful animal gave himself entirely to Jerome, and when not at his master's feet he guarded the ass belonging to the monastery, performed the office of a beast of burden, drove away thieves, and would have eaten them alive had they not sought safety in flight.

This fable met with universal acceptance during the medieval times, and more than one crusader of the army of Godfrey of Bouillon reported having seen, in the fields about Bethlehem and among the rocks of the land of David, the holy hermit accompanied by his enormous and devoted lion.

Legend is popular apotheosis of the *élite* of mankind. Fortunate are they whose high achievements have merited for them such distinction. No one, assuredly, was more worthy of it than was the humble anchoret who, although hidden in a grotto in a remote corner of Judea, was, neverthe-

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less, able, by the sheer force of knowledge and sanctity, to quicken the pulse of Christendom and to furnish us, at the same time, the most vivid and the most perfect picture of the age in which he lived and of which he and his two incomparable inspirers and collaborators will ever remain the most conspicuous figures.<sup>1</sup> For Jerome, Paula, Eustochium, all three of whom are honored by the church as saints, constitute a triple star of the first magnitude—a star whose brilliancy will suffer no diminution so long as the world shall admire friendship and holiness and acclaim profound learning and supreme genius.

<sup>1</sup> Vid. Thierry, *op. cit.*, Tom. II, p. 242 et seq.



**PART II**

**DANTE AND HIS BEATRICE**



## CHAPTER I

### BEATRICE PORTINARI

Was it from a gate of Florence,  
Or from heaven's own portals fair,  
Yon blithe throng at morning issued  
In the sparkling springtide air?

Children fair as meek-eyed angels,  
Garlands in their locks entwined,  
Down into the flowery valley,  
Singing, dancing, gayly wind.

'Neath a laurel stood young Dante,  
Thrilling to the heart to see,  
In the fairest of those damsels,  
Her who should his angel be.

Rustling in the Spring's light breezes,  
Stirr'd not every leaf above?  
Dante's young soul, did it thrill not  
To the mastering touch of love?

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Yes! the stream of song forever  
Fill'd his bosom from that day;  
Love, young love, inspired each measure,  
Love and his resistless sway.

THUS in glowing colors does the poet Uhland picture to us the first meeting of two of the world's immortals—Dante Alighieri and Beatrice Portinari. It was on the first of May, 1274, in the noble city of Florence—the city of flowers and gay festivities; the home of a refined, chivalrous and pleasure-loving people.

It was at this time the custom of the Florentines to celebrate Mayday, and even the days following, with great pomp and magnificence. The houses were decked with flowers and bunting; song and music, accompanied by the ringing of bells, filled the air with joyous sounds. Women and girls adorned with garlands and diadems took part in the festal celebration, while young men clad in white and led by one who personated

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the Lord of Love paraded the streets with every demonstration of rejoicing and delight.

After the procession, they left the narrow streets and somber palaces of the city and, following the banks of the verdant, meandering Arno, they repaired to the country which, at this season of the year, was as gay with the blooms of spring as were the meadows in which, according to Ovid, the raped Proserpine gathered flowers—

*Tot fuerunt illic quot habet natura colores.*

Here on the most delicious of greenswards, sprinkled with violets and jonquils, crocuses and fleurs-de-lis, they danced and sang the songs of their favorite minstrels and troubadours. Tables placed under the wide-spreading branches of hornbeam and boxwood were liberally supplied with refreshments for the joyous throng of merry-

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makers who, in an atmosphere richly laden not only with the blended perfume of rose, thyme and violets,

But of a thousand fragrant odors sweet,

experienced to the full the joy of living.

It was on such an occasion, when all Florence was in *festa*, when nature, in the full beauty of an Italian springtide, was at her brightest and best and her witchery was most enthralling, that Folco Portinari, a man held in much honor in those times by his fellow citizens, had gathered his neighbors at a feast in his own home. "Among them," I am quoting from Boccaccio's "Life of Dante," "was one Alighieri, and as little boys are wont to follow their fathers, especially to festive places, Dante, whose ninth year was not yet finished, accompanied him. And here, with others of his age, of whom, both boys and girls, there were many at the house of the entertainer, the first tables hav-

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ing been served, he boyishly gave himself to merrymaking at such sports as were suitable to his tender years. Among the children was a little daughter of Folco, whose name was Bice—that is, she was so called from her primitive name, Beatrice. She was, perhaps, eight years old, a pretty little thing in her girlish way, very lady-like and pleasing in her actions, and much more sedate in her manners and modest in her words than her years required. Besides this, she had very delicate features, admirably proportioned, and full, in addition to their beauty, of such dignity and charm that she was looked upon by many as an angel. She then, such as I depict her, or perchance far more beautiful, appeared at this feast before the eyes of our Dante, not, I believe, for the first time, but first with power to enamor him. And, although still a child, he received her image into his heart with such affection that, from that day for-

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ward, never so long as he lived did it depart therefrom."

"Her dress, on that day," Dante informs us in his "Vita Nuova," "was a most noble color, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age." And, describing the effect of her apparition upon him, he declares that at that moment "the spirit of life, which has its dwelling in the secretest chambers of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith; and in trembling it said these words: *Eccc deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi*"—Behold a deity stronger than I, who, coming, shall rule over me."

This is the remarkable account of the emotions excited in the heart of a boy of nine by a girl of eight. But no one who is familiar with Dante's writings, and with his absolutely truthful character, will for a mo-



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ment call this account in question. Nor will any reasonable man be disposed to judge of Dante's emotional experiences in the light of that of the average mortal. For we must bear in mind that he was as exceptional in his imagination and heart impressions as he was in his overtowering genius, and that in his case, to use language employed by him in another connection:

*Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda—*<sup>1</sup>

—A little spark is followed by a great flame.

What is here related of a boy of nine—that favored *alumnus Musarum*, as Giovanni da Virgilio calls him—is nothing more unnatural or impossible than what is recorded of such youthful prodigies as Mozart and Beethoven, or of John Stuart Mill, whose autobiography contains most astounding statements regarding his early intellectual development, or of the boy poet

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, I, 84.

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Chatterton, "the fate-marked babe," or of the precocious Pope, who was a poet almost from his childhood and who says of himself:

I lisped in numbers for the numbers came.

Nor was the impression produced upon Dante by the vision of Beatrice something wholly unique. Similar experiences are told of numerous other youthful prodigies of divers climes and periods. Thus it is recorded of Victor Hugo that, when he was a boy of nine, he fell in love with a girl of ten. The great Italian poet, Alfieri, affords another striking example of a boy who became enamored at a very early age. Speaking at a later date of this early love and of the emotions which then stirred his soul to its depths, he describes them as "effects which few persons understand, and very few experience. But it is only to these very few that it is granted to get away from the vulgar herd and become eminent in all

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the arts of life." More extraordinary still, it is averred that Cupid's dart had pierced the heart of the great sculptor, Canova—"the last of the Greeks"—when he was only five years of age.

Not less interesting is the case of Lord Byron. In a journal kept by him in 1813 he writes:

"I have been thinking lately a good deal of Mary Duff. How very odd that I should have been so utterly, devotedly fond of that girl, at an age when I could neither feel passion nor know the meaning of the word. And the effect!—My mother used always to rally me about this childish amour; and at last, many years after, when I was sixteen, she told me one day: 'Oh, Byron, I have had a letter from Edinburgh, from Miss Abercromby, and your old sweetheart, Mary Duff, is married to a Mr. Coe.' And what was my answer? I really cannot explain or account for my feelings at that mo-

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ment; but they nearly threw me into convulsions, and alarmed my mother so much, that, after I grew better, she generally avoided the subject—to *me*—and contented herself with telling it to all her acquaintances. Now, what could this be? I had never seen her since her mother's *faux-pas* at Aberdeen had been the cause of her removal to her grandmother's at Banff; we were both the merest children; yet I recollect all we said to each other, all our caresses, her features, my sleeplessness, my tormenting my mother's maid to write for me to her, which she at last did to quiet me. Poor Nancy thought I was wild and, as I could not write for myself, became my secretary. I remember, too, our walks, and the happiness of sitting by Mary, in the children's apartment, at their house not far from the Plainstones at Aberdeen, while her lesser sister Helen played with the doll, and we sat gravely making love, in our way.

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“How the deuce did all this occur so early? Where could it originate? I certainly had no sexual ideas for years afterwards; and yet my misery, my love for that girl were so violent that I sometimes doubt if I have ever been really attached since. Be that as it may, hearing of her marriage several years after was like a thunder-stroke—it nearly choked me—to the horror of my mother and the astonishment and almost incredulity of everybody. And it is a phenomenon in my existence (for I was not eight years old) which has puzzled, and will puzzle me to the latest hour of it; and lately, I know not why, the *recollection* (*not* the attachment) has recurred as forcibly as ever. I wonder if she can have the least remembrance of it or me? Or remember her pitying sister Helen for not having an admirer, too? How very pretty is the perfect image of her in my memory—her brown, dark hair, and hazel eyes; her very

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dress! I should be quite grieved to see *her now*; the reality, however beautiful, would destroy, or at least confuse, the features of the lovely Peri, which then existed in her, and still lives in my imagination, at the distance of more than sixteen years. I am now twenty-five and odd months. . . .

“I think my mother told the circumstances (on my hearing of her marriage) to the Parkynses, and certainly to the Pigot family, and probably mentioned it in her answer to Miss A., who was well acquainted with my childish *penchant*, and had sent the news on purpose for *me*,—and thanks to her!

“Next to the beginning, the conclusion has often occupied my reflections, in the way of investigation. That the facts are thus, others know as well as I, and my memory yet tells me so, in more than a whisper. But, the more I reflect, the more I am be-

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wildered to assign any cause for this precocity of affection.”<sup>1</sup>

I have adduced these instances of early love attachments to show that the awakening of the deepest sensibilities and emotions—at least in men of genius—is far from being as exceptional as is usually imagined. Many students of Dante, calling in question Dante’s early love for Beatrice as recorded in his “*Vita Nuova*,” have concluded that this and other episodes narrated in this most artistic of autobiographies are totally without foundation in fact; that Beatrice herself never had any existence outside of the poet’s fancy. Such critics reason as if there were no difference between the precocious and perfervid children of genius of sunny Italy and the stolid and phlegmatic yokels of the fog-enveloped North. Pascal’s explanation of the premature loves of supremely

<sup>1</sup> “The Life and Letters of Lord Byron,” p. 7, edited by Thomas Moore, Esq., New York, 1858.

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gifted men like Dante is that "the passions are great in proportion as the intelligence is great. . . . In a great soul everything is great." <sup>1</sup>

Dante's first meeting with Beatrice, as above described, was undoubtedly the greatest event of his life and its effect on him was as potent as it was enduring. "From that time forward," he declares in the "*Vita Nuova*," "Love quite governed my soul; which was immediately espoused to him, and with so safe and undisputed a lordship (by virtue of strong imagination) that I had nothing left for it but to do all his bidding continually. He oftentimes commanded me to seek if I might see this youngest of the

<sup>1</sup> A mesure que l'on a plus d'esprit les passions sont plus grandes, parce que les passions n'étant que des sentiments et des pensées qu'appartiennent purement à l'esprit, quoiqu'elles soient occasionnées par le corps, il est visible qu'elles ne sont plus que l'esprit même—Dans une grande âme tout est grand. "*Discours sur les Passions de l'Amour*," Tom. III, pp. 121-122, Paris, 1908.



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angels: wherefore I in my boyhood often went in search of her, and found her so noble and praiseworthy that certainly of her might have been said these words of the poet Homer: 'She seemed not to be the daughter of mortal man, but of God.' And albeit her image, that was with me always, was an exultation of love to subdue me, it was yet of so perfect a quality that it never allowed me to be overruled by Love without the faithful counsel of reason whensoever such counsel was useful to be heard."

The second time that Dante, according to his own testimony, met the object of his affections was when she had attained the full bloom of youthful grace and beauty. We read in the "Vita Nuova":

"After the lapse of so many days that nine years exactly were completed since the above written appearance of this most gracious being, on the last of those days it happened that the same wonderful lady

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appeared to me dressed all in pure white, between two gentle ladies elder than she. And passing through a street, she turned her eyes thither where I stood sorely abashed: and by her unspeakable courtesy, which is now guerdoned in the Great Cycle, she saluted me with so virtuous a bearing that I seemed then and there to behold the very limit of blessedness."

If Dante's first vision of Beatrice was the greatest event of his life, this second apparition of "the glorious lady" of his mind was surely next in importance. When she was first made manifest to his eyes, she appeared to him as the youngest of the angels; as one who was not the daughter of mortal man, but of God. At her second appearance, when she was

Blooming in her beauty's spring,

the effect was even more magical and potent. Beatrice then became Dante's muse,

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as well as his angel, for swiftly like the  
night-blooming cereus,

His poetic might had ripen'd  
Into stately blossoming.

According to Plato, it was the lover and not the beloved who was the inspirer. But in Dante's case it was quite the reverse of this. It was Beatrice, whom Dante called "my beatitude," "the glorious lady of my mind," who was not only the efficient agent of his new birth, but also the one who made him a poet, and inspired what Ruskin justly calls "the greatest religious poem yet given to men."

Dante's second meeting with Beatrice, when he "stood sorely abashed" in her presence, recalls a noble passage in Plato's "Phaedrus," in which we read:

"When the real lover beholds a godlike face, the form and very image as it were of beauty, he shudders first and is surprised

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by some of his old awe; then gazing fixedly, pays it reverence as though it were a god."

Dante and his inspirer were born in a glorious age—an age of great rulers, like St. Louis, Edward I and Frederick II; an age of great scholars, like Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, St. Thomas Aquinas—the Aristotle of the thirteenth century—and St. Bonaventure—the Plato of the same century; an age of great artists, like Cimabue and Giotto; an age that "built the churches where we worship"; that "framed the laws by which we move"; an age of great reformers, like St. Francis of Assisi; and great spiritual teachers, like St. Bernard and Hugh and Richard of St. Victor; the age of Magna Carta, which is the glory of all the free institutions that are the glory of the modern world; the age of the first great universities; the age that witnessed the formation of the noblest of our modern languages and the daybreak of the most splendid of

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our modern literatures; the age of the “Roman de la Rose,” of the “Roman de Troie,” of Benoit of St. Maur, and the Arthurian legends of Chrestien of Troyes; an age that rapidly carried forward the magnificent work begun by St. Benedict and Charlemagne and Alfred the Great; an age that “made Venice the mistress of the Eastern seas and bade Florence stand forth as the new type of democratic freedom; an age big with promise of the future; an age that witnessed the culmination of the Holy Roman Empire, that ushered in the Renaissance and saw the dawn of the new era in which we now live; an age from which, according to the distinguished Italian historian, Cesare Cantu, ‘derives all we have and are.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

With the single exception of the Golden Age of Greece—the age of Pericles and his

<sup>1</sup> Da essa deriva quanto abbiamo e siamo. “Dante e il Suo Secolo,” p. 3, Florence, 1865.

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inspirer, the rarely gifted Aspasia—no other period in the history of intellectual progress had ever known such marvelous creative forces in art, literature, poetry, architecture and philosophy as the age of Dante and Beatrice. Everything seemed to converge towards them and towards their beautiful city on the Arno—the Athens of the closing medieval world. Chivalry with all its beneficent and refining influences had aided Christianity in placing woman on the highest pedestal she had ever occupied. The troubadours and minnesingers extended to womankind in general something of the reverence which, previously, had been exhibited only to the Blessed Virgin. Indeed, the love of the troubadour and the minnesinger was the outcome of the devotion which the Christian peoples of the Middle Ages professed for the Virgin Mother. The first effect of this love was what was known as the *joi d'amor*, a species of mental exaltation which

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stimulated the poet to lead a life worthy of the lady of his heart and to make him feel that this love-stimulus was a moral and intellectual force which should elevate him far above those who were not actuated by such a dominant principle.

Non es meravilha s'ieu chan  
Melhs de nul autre chantador,  
Car plus trai mos cors ves Amor  
E mehls sui faitz a son coman—

—It is no wonder if I sing better than any other singer, for my heart draws nearer to Love and I am better made for Love's command.

Thus sings Bernart de Ventadorn, one of the most noted of the troubadours whose influence is observed in the writings of Dante.

As to the salutary influence of the beloved on her lover, we have it admirably expressed in a couplet of the minnesinger,

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Walter von der Vogelweide, when he sings:

Swer guotes wîbes minne hat  
Der schamt sich aller missetât—  
—He who has a good woman's  
love is ashamed of every evil  
deed.

It was the troubadours and the minnesingers who prepared the way for the poetical achievements of Dante. For several generations before the great Florentine's birth, *lo gay saber*—the art of lyric poetry and the codified rules of chivalry—had been the unremitting study not only of the singers of Provence—the original home of the troubadours—but also of those of other parts of Southern and Western Europe. And the number of those who sang the praises of their lady loves was almost incredible. According to the Catalonian troubadour, Raimon Vidal of Besadun, "All Christian people, Jews, Saracens, emperors, princes,



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kings, dukes, counts, viscounts, vavassors, and all other nobles with clergy, citizens and villeins, small and great, daily give their minds to composing and singing.”<sup>1</sup> Even women devoted themselves to the cultivation of the *gay saber*. Among the most noted of women troubadours was the *trobairitz*, Beatrice, Countess of Die.

A few of the troubadours had more or less permanent occupation as court poets, but the majority of them led a wandering life. They traversed not only the whole of France, but also extended their peregrinations to the Iberian Peninsula, to England, to Italy, to the lands bordering the Danube, and to the islands of the Mediterranean. One of them was almost a rival of Marco Polo as a traveler, for it is said of him that he visited most of the then known world.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. J. Chaytor, “The Troubadours,” p. 122, Cambridge, 1912.

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It would be impossible to estimate the influence of the troubadours in the development of European literature. They were the first poets of the modern era to emphasize the value of technique in poetry and to provide those exquisite models of form which have been used by the poets of succeeding ages.

There was, however, a marked difference between the troubadours of Provence and those of Italy. The former were usually knights who were skilled in versification, while the latter were men of learning and deep philosophical insight as well as distinguished lyrists. As compared with the Provençal troubadour, or inventor of new songs, the Italian *trovatore* exhibited in his work more of the characteristics of the Roman *vates*, or inspired bard. He was more given to mysticism and searching analysis of things of the soul. Among the most illustrious of these creators of the *dolce stil*

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*nuovo*—the sweet new style—were Guido Guinicelli, Cino de Pistoia and Guido Cavalcanti, who were among the earliest and most loyal friends of Dante Alighieri.

Dante's debt to the troubadours of both the Provençal and Italian schools was almost as great as his obligations to the eminent scholars among his contemporaries. As St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernard, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor were his masters in the sacred sciences of dogmatic and mystical theology, so were his predecessors in the *gay saber* and the *dolce stil nuovo* his teachers in all those forms of verse in which he achieved such distinction. The sonnet, the ballad, the madrigal, the canzone, the *terza rima*, which he carried to such a marvelous pitch of perfection, were all of Provençal origin and all ready to his hand when he met his lodestar, Beatrice, and when, under her inspiration, he began those matchless works that have

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placed him in the forefront of the greatest of the world's poets.

The first sonnet which Dante wrote, or at least the first one that has come down to us, was composed while under the exaltation produced by his second vision of Beatrice, when she saluted him "with so virtuous a bearing" that he seemed "to behold the very limits of blessedness." This was followed by many other poems devoted to the praise of his lady, of her who made

His heart strong for his soul's behoof,  
and who in grace and beauty was

As high as nature's skill can soar.

These poems, with a running commentary, were the first fruits of his genius, and constitute that wonderful love story known as the "Vita Nuova," or the "New Life." It is a record of that new life which he began after meeting Beatrice, "the muse of his understanding and the angel of his soul."

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And what a beautiful and unique record it is! And what a fascinating story of sublimated and ennobling love!

There is nothing in the "Vita Nuova" that recalls the erotic utterances of Sappho and Anacreon; nothing that is suggestive of the "Amores" of Ovid or of the "Epithalamium to Peleus and Thetis" by Catullus. In the conception of these pagan singers love was a mere physical emotion. It had nothing of that delicacy of sentiment of the lover for his beloved; nothing of that affection, devotion and silent adoration which were the products of Christian teaching and medieval chivalry.<sup>1</sup> The tender, overmastering love that elevates the soul to the

<sup>1</sup> "Whatever was most noble in the self-devotion of the Crusaders; most beneficial to the world in the foundation of the knightly orders; most brilliant in the lives of Richard, the Edwards, Tancred, Godfrey of Bouillon; most enthusiastic in the lives of Rudel, Dante, Petrarch; most humane in the courtesy of the Black Prince; most splendid in the courage of Gaston de Foix; in the constancy of Sir Walter Manny; in

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heights of religious worship; the love that, to quote Dante, "makes ill thought to perish"; that drives into "foul hearts a deadly chill," is a love which was quite foreign to that celebrated by the amorous lyrists of Greece and Rome, for the love of the pagans was fully as sensual as that of their gods and goddesses, of which Goethe sings:

In der heroischen Zeit, da Götter and Göttinen  
liebten,  
Folgte Begierde dem Blick, folgte Genuss der  
Begier—<sup>1</sup>

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the loyalty of Blondel; in the piety of St. Louis—may be claimed by the evanescent and impalpable yet potent spirit which we call Chivalry." A. Symonds, "An Introduction to the Study of Dante," p. 256, London, 1906.

Chivalry was "a part of the life of the ages which built the cathedrals, and instituted the orders of the Temple and St. John, of St. Francis and St. Dominic, and the same ages produced Magna Charta, the legislation of Edward I, the 'Summa' of St. Thomas Aquinas, and the 'Divine Comedy,'" F. W. Cornish, "Chivalry," p. 198, London, 1911.

<sup>1</sup> "Römische Elegien," I, 3.

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—In the heroical times when loved each god and  
each goddess  
Longing attended on sight; then with fruition  
was blessed.

To such carnal-minded poets the pure, spiritual love of Dante for Beatrice would be quite incomprehensible.

Nor can the "New Life" be compared with the "Fabliaux et Contes," that were so popular during the Middle Ages, nor with the lyrics of the troubadours and trouvères. It is quite unlike that charming idyl "Aucassin and Nicolette" or the prose romances of Arthur and Charlemagne, and is immeasurably superior to the *chansons* of Arnault Daniel, Bertran de Born and Folquet de Marselha.

The "Vita Nuova" is not only the sweetest and most delicate of love stories, but it is also one of the most remarkable of autobiographies. It is a delicate and touching psychological account of Dante's love for

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Beatrice and of the emotions which she excited in his soul during her short life on earth.

In no other autobiography, except, possibly, in the "Confessions" of St. Augustine, will one find such glowing fervor and such fervid intensity. And in no other poet do we find a spirit that is so passionate and so pure; so strong and so tender; so radiant and so loyal. Those who know Dante only through his *Inferno* find him stern, somber, ruthless, unrelenting. But they do not know him, and are incapable of judging a soul in which the rigor of inexorable justice coexisted with ineffable pity and tenderness. Mrs. Browning in her "Vision of the Poets" gives a proper estimate of the great Florentine's character when she pictures him as

. . . Dante stern  
And sweet, whose spirit was an urn  
For wine and milk poured out in turn.



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As a record of real life, the "Vita Nuova" is unsurpassed in literature. But unlike most love poems and romances which dilate on the personal graces and charms of their heroines—

The vermeil tinctur'd lip,  
Love-darting eyes and tresses like the morn—

Dante's "New Life" tells us nothing about the physical characteristics of Beatrice, except that she had light hair and a pearl-like complexion. The poet gives no other indication that would aid an artist in painting a portrait. There is, it is true, a canzone known as "Il Ritratto"—The Portrait—sometimes attributed to Dante, in which he is supposed to paint the picture of his beloved as she appeared to him in all the glory of her youthful beauty, but the authenticity of this poem is doubtful. It lacks that profound reverence, that exquisite spirituality which so characterizes all that Dante writes

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about the mistress of his heart in those of his works which scholars generally accept as authentic.

Petrarch loves to dilate on the beautiful, angelic mouth—*la bella bocca angelica*—of Laura; Ariosto revels in word paintings of the golden tresses, the sweetest eyes, the roses fragrant-warm of the red lips of his mistress, while Tasso depicts the lovely mouth of his Leonora as

Purpurea conca in cui si nutre  
Candor di perle elette e pellegrine—

—A crimson shell, where pearls of snowy sheen  
Do grow its smooth and curved lips atween.

There is nothing of this in Dante. He gives us an image of Beatrice's personal graces by telling us of the impression she produced on him. He portrays the beauty of her soul as reflected in her deportment and in that *dolce riso*—sweet smile—which raised him above the things of earth; the

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sweet smile, which, in the terrestrial paradise, drew him to her *con l' antica rete*—with the olden meshes—that had held him captive in his youth; the sweet smile—reflecting somewhat of the beauty of the Deity—that uplifted him from star to star, and carried him to the highest empyrean—carried him even to the throne of God.

Nor was there in Dante's love of Beatrice any of that overweening love of self, that excessive egotism, that convulsive passion and jealousy which are so characteristic of youthful lovers; nothing of the sensual and querulous loves which fill the pages of pagan poets and modern romancers and dramatists. Dante's love, though deep and sensitive, was nevertheless as calm as it was pure and loyal. It was a love which, as he assures us, caused him to forgive everyone who had offended him and to make him feel that he no longer had an enemy in the world.

But with all this it was likewise a love

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which, almost from its beginning, was tinged with sadness and melancholy. He felt himself unworthy of the great happiness which he experienced in the presence of Beatrice, and was continually haunted by the thought of her early death.

His forebodings were almost prophetic. The day of mourning came sooner than he anticipated. Dante was occupied in writing a canzone in praise of his lady, but he had hardly finished the first stanza when, as he writes in the "Vita Nuova," "the Lord God of justice called my most gracious lady unto Himself, that she might be glorious under the banner of that blessed Queen Mary, whose name had always a deep reverence in the words of holy Beatrice."

The blow so stunned the poet lover that his friends despaired of his life. So overwhelming was his loss that he imagined the whole of Florence mourned with him the loss of its most precious jewel. And re-

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calling the words of Jeremias, he exclaimed in the depths of his sorrow: "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! How is the mistress of the Gentiles become as a widow?" And so fully was he convinced that all the people of Florence shared his bereavement that he wrote to the principal men of the city an epistle beginning with the lament of Jeremias, "*Quomodo sedet sola civitas.*" He was saddened by the thought that pilgrims from a distant country, who passed through the grief-stricken city, had not heard of his Beatrice, or of the great loss that Florence had suffered in the untimely death of his beloved. Approaching them and speaking for the city mournful, as well as for himself, he, in broken voice, tells them, the pilgrim-folk:

If ye will but stay, whom I accost,  
And listen to my words a little space,  
At going ye shall mourn with a loud voice.  
It is Beatrice that she hath lost;

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Of whom the least word spoken holds such grace  
That men weep hearing it, and have no choice.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Vita Nuova," penultimate sonnet.

In the vicissitudes of life and fortune, no two of the supreme poets of the world more closely resemble each other than Dante and Camões, the great epic genius of Portugal. Both endured poverty and exile the greater part of their lives. Both in early life came under the sweet influence of womanly goodness and beauty. Both lost their fair and gentle inspirers almost before they had attained the full bloom of youthful grace and loveliness. To both the premature deaths of their ladyloves were the most poignant afflictions of their lives.

When Camões learned of the death of his beloved, the beautiful Catherina de Atayde, he was desolate beyond measure and expressed his supreme anguish in a way that recalls the overwhelming grief of Dante at the death of Beatrice. It is because of the similarity of the joys and sorrows of these sovereign poets that I have associated Dante's sonnet on the loss of Beatrice with the exquisite sonnet of Camões—as translated by Mr. Richard Garnett—in which he addresses his cherished Catherina as

Soul of my soul, that didst so early wing  
From our poor world thou heldest in disdain,  
Bound be I ever to my mortal pain  
So thou hast peace before the Eternal King!

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Dante's grief at the loss of the angel of his soul, the muse of his intellect, was as deep as the love which inflamed his heart when he first met her at the May festival at the home of her father, and when, nine years later, she saluted him with that gracious smile which was to him as a beacon-light during the whole of his extraordinary career.

But Dante did not allow his terrible loss to dispirit or unman him. It served rather as a stimulus to make him more worthy of his angel in heaven; more loyal to the one he thenceforth called

That lady of all gentle memories

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If to the realms where thou dost soar and sing  
Remembrance of aught earthly may attain,  
Forget not the deep love thou didst so fain  
Discover my fond eyes inhabiting  
And if my yearning heart unsatisfied,  
And pang on earth incurable have might  
To profit thee and me, pour multiplied  
Thy meek entreaties to the Lord of Light,  
That swiftly He would raise thee to my side,  
As suddenly He rapt thee from my sight.

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who had so illumined his mind during her brief sojourn on earth; to make him gird himself for an achievement that would immortalize both the lover and the beloved.

In the last sonnet of the "Vita Nuova," in which the poet fancies seeing in Heaven

A lady round whom splendors move  
In homage—

a lady whom he recognizes as his loved Beatrice,—he tells us of having

A new perception born of grieving Love.

"After writing this sonnet," he declares, "it was given me to behold a very wonderful vision, wherein I saw things which determined me that I would say nothing further of this most blessed one, until such time as I could discourse more worthily concerning her. And to this end I labor all I can, as she well knoweth. Wherefore, if it be His pleasure, through whom is the life of all



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things, that my life continue with me a few years, it is my hope that I shall yet write concerning her what hath not before been written of any woman.”

In “The Convito” Dante informs us how, after a period of deep mourning, he proceeded to prepare himself to write of his loved one what had “not before been written of any woman.”

“When,” he informs us, “the first delight of my soul—Beatrice—was lost, no comforting availed me. None the less, after a certain time my mind, which sought a cure, set about returning to that method which some disconsolates had taken for consoling themselves. And I took to reading that book, not known to many, of Boethius, whereby he, captive and outcast, had consoled himself; also Cicero’s ‘De Amicitia,’ referring to Lælius and his dear friend Scipio. And, although at first it was hard for me to enter into their significance, I fully entered there-

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into so far as the art of grammar which I possessed and a little force of mind of my own would allow. By which force of mind I saw, as if dreamily, many things—as may be seen in the ‘*Vita Nuova*.’ I thus found not only a remedy to my tears but utterances of authors and of sciences and of books; considering which I fully judged that Philosophy, which had been the mistress of these authors, sciences and books, was a supreme thing. And I imagined her fashioned as a noble lady; and I could not imagine her in any action other than merciful. . . . And then I began to go where she displayed herself in truth—that is to the schools of the religious and the disputations of the Philosophizing: so that in a short time, perhaps thirty months, I began to feel so much of her sweetness that the love of her chased away and destroyed every other thought.”<sup>1</sup>

The great crisis in Dante’s life had now

<sup>1</sup> “*Il Convito*,” II, Cap. XIII.

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passed. In his case, as in that of all truly noble souls, trial and affliction had purified his heart and given him the strength required for the great work he was about to undertake. The image of his *donna angelica*—his angelicized lady—which had gladdened him in his wonderful vision, daily became brighter and more comforting. Divested of her earthly veil, she appears before him in all her beauty and goodness, with a halo of glory encircling her head. Enraptured and transformed, the ardent and faithful lover finds himself endowed with new strength and courage. His Beatrice, *beata e bella*—blessed and beautiful—again comforts him with that sweet smile in which he declares he was wont, while she was on earth, to find

Lo fondo

Della mia grazia e del mio paradiso—<sup>1</sup>

—The bottom

Both of my grace and of my Paradise.

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<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, XV, 36.

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She beckons him heavenwards, and, in words of passing sweetness, bids him prepare himself to join her in that home of the blessed where they shall never again be separated—where, as Michelangelo wrote long afterwards,

Heaven opened wide to him its portals splendid,  
Who from his country's—closed against him—  
fled.

From the date of that wonderful vision Dante was a new man—a man of approved courage, and prepared to encounter all the trials and difficulties of life. He knew not, indeed, what the future had in store for him. He could not foresee that he was to be banished from that Florence which he loved so tenderly and which he was never to see again; that he was to be separated forever from family and friends and all that he held most dear; that he was to be a wanderer wherever his beautiful Italian was spoken;

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that he was to endure all the anguish and rebuffs of poverty and exile. Only long years afterwards did he hear from the lips of his ancestor, Cacciaguida, the prophetic words:

Thou shalt have proof how savoreth of salt  
The bread of others, and how hard the road  
The going down and up another's stairs.<sup>1</sup>

But love knows no difficulties; recoils not before opposition, however formidable; is victorious, even when all the world conspires against it. When his country demanded his services Dante generously threw himself into the political arena, and at a time, too, when factional strife was fiercest and when participation in government affairs so frequently led to banishment and death. And when he was ostracized from the land of his birth and from the home to which he was never to return under penalty of being

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, XVII, 58-60.

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burned alive—*igne comburatur sic quod moriatur*<sup>1</sup>—the heart-scathed exile, made strong and brave by his deep and abiding love for Beatrice, was ready to confront all “the arrows of outrageous fortune,” and like Belisarius, able to show himself greatest and noblest when all the world seemed to be arrayed against him.

Dazzled and comforted by his wonderful vision, Dante, as he had resolved, wrote no more in praise of Beatrice until he had fully prepared himself for his great life-work—for what was to be an imperishable monument to her who was to be the protagonist of his immortal masterpiece as well as its inspiring muse. The “*Divina Commedia*”—that marvelous tribute to Beatrice and, through her, to “the eternal womanly”—was gradually assuming form in the poet’s mind,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. F. X. Kraus, “Dante, Sein Leben und Sein Werk, Sein Verhältniss zur Kunst und zur Politik,” p. 53, Berlin, 1897.

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and he could already discern, as in a mirror darkly, the beauty and the glory of the incomparable creation of his genius.

But what immense labor was involved in the poet's preparation for his great undertaking! It meant the making himself master of all the knowledge of his time—of becoming proficient in science and literature; in philosophy and theology; in the teachings of the master-minds of Greece and Rome, as well as those of the Scholastics and Fathers of the Church. It meant a thorough familiarity with the works of Aristotle and St. Augustine; of St. Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon and Albertus Magnus; of Hugh and Richard of St. Victor; of St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure; and of a host of others.<sup>1</sup> It meant a broad knowledge of

<sup>1</sup> "Dante," writes the scholarly Dr. Döllinger, "possessed a rare cultivation of mind and his learning was so comprehensive and various that, if we except Roger Bacon, who belonged to an earlier period, very few can be found to come up to him, and none who sur-

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nature; of her manifold forces and beauties. It meant long years of close study of the divers phenomena of earth, sea and sky and the countless manifestations of animal and vegetable life. It meant, above all, a far-reaching knowledge of the human heart, of its promptings, its ambitions, its secret mainsprings of action. It meant psychological analysis of the highest order; a high and never-failing sense of justice and a keen insight into things eternal and divine.

Of the wanderings of Dante in quest of knowledge and of the sufferings and privations which he had, for long years, to endure

passed him." "Studies in European History," p. 102, London, 1890.

Cf. also P. H. Wicksteed, "Dante and Aquinas," London, 1913; E. G. Gardner, "Dante and the Mystics," London, 1913; Paget Toynbee, "Dante Studies and Researches," London, 1902; E. Moore, "Studies in Dante," Oxford, 1896, and Karl Witte, "Dante Forschungen," Heilbronn, 1869-79.



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while accomplishing his vow to his Beatrice, but little is known with certainty. In the beginning of "The Convito," the poet gives a most pathetic account of the mortifications and miseries which he had to experience during his long and unmerited exile. "Ah," he writes, "that it had pleased the Disposer of the Universe that the occasion for my excuse had never occurred! for thus neither would others have offended against me nor should I have suffered penalty unjustly—the penalty, I say, of exile and poverty. Since it was the pleasure of the citizens of the most fair and famous daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me forth from her most sweet bosom (in which I was born and nurtured up to the summit of my life and in which, with the good allowance of them, I desire with all my heart to rest my tired spirit, and to terminate the time which is given to me) to the regions, well-nigh all, to which this language extends, have I gone

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pilgriming, almost begging, exhibiting contrary to my will the wound of fortune, which many times is wont to be imputed to the wounded one. Truly have I been a bark without sail and without rudder, carried to divers ports and strands and shores by the dry wind which dolorous poverty exhales. And I have seemed vile to the eyes of many who perchance, from a certain fame, had imagined me in other form; in the sight of whom not only was my person debased but every work, whether already done or remaining to be done, was accounted of less worth.”<sup>1</sup>

Boccaccio, in a Latin poem addressed to Petrarch, refers to the same trials and peregrinations when he writes:

Thou know'st perchance how Phoebus' self did  
guide  
Our Tuscan Dante up the lofty side

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<sup>1</sup> “Il Convito,” I, Cap. III.

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Of snow-clad Cyrrha; how our Poet won  
Parnassus' peak, and founts of Helicon:  
How, with Apollo, ranging wide he sped  
Through Nature's whole domain and visited  
Imperial Rome, and Paris, and so passed  
O'er seas to Britain's distant shores at last.<sup>1</sup>

And Giovanni da Serravalle, bishop of Fermo, who, at the request of a number of English bishops at the Council of Constance, translated the "Divina Commedia" into Latin, does not hesitate to state that Dante studied theology in Oxford as well as in Paris—*Dilexit theologiam sacram in qua diu studuit tam ni Oxoniis, in regno Angliæ quam Parisiis, in regno Frantie.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. E. Gladstone, "Did Dante Study in Oxford?" in the *Nineteenth Century*, June, 1892, and the reply by A. Bartolini, entitled, "Il Viaggio di Dante a Oxford; ■ Proposito d'un Articolo di Gladstone," in *L'Arcadia*, An. VI, No. III.

<sup>2</sup> Fratrìs Joannis de Serravalle, "Translatio et Commentum," p. 15, Prato, 1891. The same writer also informs us that Dante had qualified himself for his doctorate in the University of Paris, but that

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Journeys to the places mentioned could now be made in a few hours, or in a few days, at most, and with every comfort. But it was quite different in the time of Dante. Means of communication were few and difficult. Highways were as wretched and dangerous as they were limited in number. Italy, Germany and France were then divided into countless little states—baronies, marquisates, city-republics—each of which had its own laws and its own form of government, its own peculiar dress and customs, coinage and language. Everywhere the traveler found his way barred by tolls and exactions of all kinds. To travel to dispoverty prevented him from getting his degree. “Fuit (Dantes) Bachallarius in Universitate Parisiensi,” declares Serravalle, “in qua legit Sententias pro forma Magisterii, Legit Bibliam, respondit omnibus Doctoribus, ut moris est, et fecit omnes actus, qui fieri debent per doctorandum in sacra Theologia. Nihil restabat fieri, nisi inceptio, seu conventus; et ad incipiendum, seu faciendum conventum, deerat sibi pecunia: pro qua acquirenda rediit Florentiam.” P. 15.

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tant parts with any degree of safety and convenience it was necessary to join a large trade caravan or to accompany the train of some powerful lord or government functionary. What is now, thanks to our splendid roads and our superbly equipped automobiles and railway cars, a pleasant trip of but a few hours or days, was then a long and dangerous journey of weeks and months, during which the traveler was subject to innumerable privations and sufferings of which we have now no conception. All journeys, except in the case of the rich and the powerful, were made afoot. Lodging houses, outside of monastic institutions, were as rare as they were cheerless and uncomfortable. To go from Florence to Paris was then a more serious undertaking than it would now be to journey around the world, or to traverse the Continent of Africa from Mombasa to the mouth of the Congo. It required both courage and

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endurance to travel in those days, and one who made the journey from Rome to the British Isles was regarded as possessing the qualities of both an adventurer and a hero.<sup>1</sup>

To keep his promise to write of Beatrice what before had never been written of any woman, Dante resolved to undertake one of these long and trying journeys. We have no record of the poet's wanderings during the long period intervening between his banishment from his beloved Florence and his death as an exile in Ravenna. More is the pity. For had Dante left us an account—such as he alone could have written—of his journeyings in the different countries which we know he visited; had he told us of his experiences in the different universities in which he sought the knowledge which he was in quest of; had he given us pictures—

<sup>1</sup> For an interesting account of Dante's "Lehr- und Wanderjahre," see Kraus, *op. cit.*, Cap. IV.

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as he alone could have painted them—of scenes by the wayside and of the courts at which he was an honored guest, we should have the most interesting and most instructive travel book ever written, and one which would serve to fill out the numerous *lacunæ* which exist in the life of the world's incomparable poet.

But notwithstanding this absence of a record which would now be so invaluable in all that concerned his exterior life and his relations with his fellow men, we are not entirely without indications concerning his inner life—concerning the occupations of that ardent soul who was ever aflame with the love of his Beatrice, a love which withdrew him from the vulgar herd—*della volgare schiera*—and preoccupied him, wherever he was, to the exclusion of all other things. For Dante, although the most self-concealing of men, was, paradoxical as it may seem, one of the most self-revealing.

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He is unconsciously his own biographer. Like Shakespeare, he is always, without appearing to do so, writing about himself. In all his works, as in those of Goethe, there is *Dichtung und Wahrheit*—poetry and truth. And although his contemporaries have left but scant material for even a brief biography of one of whom Michelangelo declared

Simil uom nè maggior non nacque mai—

—Ne'er walked the earth a greater man than he.

he is, nevertheless, in all that concerns his real character and his opinions regarding all the great questions of the present and the hereafter, the best known man that ever lived. For no one has put in clearer or more beautiful language his views on so many subjects of transcendent importance, as did Dante Alighieri. So true is this that if it were possible to meet him, we should feel that he was an intimate friend who had never



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concealed anything from us—who had discoursed with us on all subjects: science, literature, philosophy, theology, love, poverty, happiness, the world to come and all that of which it most imports us to have accurate knowledge.

After her death, Beatrice, in the eyes of Dante, as we read in the “Vita Nuova,”

Divenne spirital bellezza grande—

—Grew perfectly and spiritually fair.

But her beauteous image was never more vividly before him than during the countless vicissitudes of his long and troubled exile. The sweet and precious memory of his noble and gentle lady sustained him in poverty and made the bread which he ate at the table of others savor less of salt, and the stairs in the homes of strangers less difficult to ascend. His enemies may, indeed, compel him to spend his life in exile, but the footsore, grief-worn wayfarer never feels

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alone. The consoling spirit, the angel of his soul, who was the joy of his youth, is still with him to encourage and support him and fix his mind on higher things. And he is cheered and strengthened in his lofty purpose by the touching and ever reëchoing words of his poet friend, Cino da Pistoia, addressed to him on the occasion of Beatrice's death:

Perche' Dio l'aggia locata fra i suoi  
Ella tuttora dimora con voi—

—God hath her with Himself eternally,  
Yet she inhabits every hour with thee.

During Dante's twenty years of exile; during that long period when he was engaged on his great epos of the soul—that *poema sacro* “to which both heaven and earth had set their hand”—a poem which deals with the deepest mysteries of our existence and the greatest problems of the universe, visible and invisible, and treats of

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subjects—*avia Pieridum loca*—that before had been “unattempted in prose or rhyme,” he could well say

L’acqua ch’ io prendo giammai non si corse—<sup>1</sup>

—The sea I sail has never yet been passed.

But during these long years of lost dreams, years of sorrow and disappointment and shattered hopes, years when his life seemed to be a dismal failure, his vigils and wanderings were always cheered and blessed by the almost sensible presence of one “all compact of angel instincts breathing Paradise.”

He felt that his loved one, still alive with the warmth of love and grace and beauty, as she was during her short existence on earth, was ever near him and presiding over his thoughts and life. Of this sweet and ever-present inspirer of his mind he could, of a truth, exclaim in the words of Petrarch:

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, II, 7.

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Dolce del mio pensier ôra Beatrice.

For Beatrice not only mitigated the bitterness of his long and cruel exile, but she gave him strength to complete the colossal monument which he had vowed to erect in her honor. Her sweet small voice, what Chateaubriand would call her "visible melody," taught him the significance of the cross and the purifying value of suffering. She taught him also how to transmute the seeming tragedy of his life into immortal song and, at the end of his long quest of peace, she had him cheerfully sing with the blessed in Paradise

E la sua voluntade e nostra pace—<sup>1</sup>

—And His will is our peace.

One loves to walk in the footsteps of Dante as under the impulse of his wonderful vision, and his abiding love of Beatrice,

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, III, 85.

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he wanders from refuge to refuge and from country to country. Following the indications, brief though they be, of the "Divina Commedia," we can see him scaling the sun-kissed Apennines and the snow-mantled Alps, or silently moving along the flower-clad banks of the Po or the Rhone, gathering in the early dawn springtime blooms, that brim

With sunbeams, leaves grown tender in the dew  
or seeking repose under an umbrageous  
oak where he is gently fanned by zephyrs  
whose breath gives

Purple to the violet, blushes to the rose.

We can follow him along the "amber-fretted strands" of the Adriatic and the Mediterranean when he finds them overspread by "the sweet blue of Oriental sapphire," or "gently trembling wavelets." We can, in fancy, fix our gaze on him as he con-

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templates the rushing torrent of Aquacheta, the superb scenery of the Adige and of the Lago di Garda and the musical streamlets of the Casentino and the Upper Arno. We may observe him as he strolls through the pine woods of Ravenna, with their gentle whisperings and melodious murmurs, or as he carefully scans the rocky chasms and landslides of the Tyrol, the originals of those which are so marked a feature of parts of his *Inferno*. But still more may we study him as he confers with the scholars of Bologna and Padua and Paris; as he takes his seat in the Street of Straw,<sup>1</sup> in

<sup>1</sup> So called because the floors of the schools along this street were strewn with straw on which, in lieu of benches, the students sat while listening to the lectures given by their masters. It was in the region now known as the Quartier Latin.

If one may judge from a medieval poem, the lodgings of the students who attended lectures in the Street of Straw were as uncomfortable and as ill provided as their straw-strewn lecture-rooms. Their beds were hard mattresses stretched on the floor and

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Paris, with other enthusiastic students of the great French school in which were still heard the echoes of Aquinas, that prince of their food consisted chiefly of beans, peas, and cabbage, of which the chief condiment was a good appetite. The lectures were often begun before daybreak and without artificial light and were not infrequently three hours in length. But despite these early lectures and their many attendant discomforts the students of the Street of Straw—our Dante among them—were always wide awake and exhibited an intense interest in their lectures, as is evinced by the verses of a certain medieval poet who thus pictures the eager searchers after knowledge:

Aure et mente bibit et verba cadentia promo  
Promptus utroque levat, oculique et mentis in illo  
Fixa vigilque manet acies aurisque maritat  
Pronuba dilectam cupida cum mente Minervam.

Cf. H. Rashdall, "The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages," Vol. II, Part II, p. 652, and "Forschungen zur Deutschen Geschichte," Vol. XX, p. 475 et seq.

Of all the privations and miseries which Dante had to endure while he was, in poverty and adversity, preparing himself to fulfill his promise to glorify his Beatrice, those of his university days in Paris were not the least trying.

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theologians who was to exert so potent an influence on the author of the “*Divina Commedia*” and whose death, it is interesting to note, preceded by only a few weeks Dante’s first meeting with Beatrice—a meeting that marked the beginning of his new life.

Whether Dante’s wayfaring was during the rigor of winter or during the balmy springtide, his poet soul was ever alive to all the myriad beauties of earth and sea and sky—to the blush and fragrance of the fresh-blown rose; the caroling of the joyous lark “in the gleam of the new-born day”; the twinkling of the stars in a clear Italian sky; the silvery music of a mountain stream; the gorgeousness of the clouds painted by the rising or setting sun. Everything—from the humblest floweret to the loftiest Alpine peak—was submitted by him to the scrutiny of a trained artist and to the critical acumen of the profound man of science. And where-



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soever he happened to be, he was always intent on collecting material for the great monument which was to perpetuate the sweet name of his *Beata Beatrix*. In the countless forms of life, in the myriad phenomena of the physical world, he found perennial founts of poesy, which enabled him to present with rare vividness the most recondite subjects of philosophy and theology.

And who can estimate the joy and the happiness that inundated the soul of the poet as he was thus engaged in fulfilling the noble promise which he had made to write of his beloved what never before had been said of any woman? In the eyes of the world he was a lone exile pursuing his solitary way and living on the charity of strangers. But he was not alone. For his lodestar was always within his ken, beckoning him onwards and upwards. His angel Beatrice was ever near him, and through her he detects countless beauties in nature which escape the or-

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dinary observer—beauties which he transfers to the pages of that sacred poem of which his angel muse is not only the inspirer but also the very soul.

It is safe to say that, after the death of Beatrice, the happiest days that Dante ever knew were when he was condemned to what was, in the eyes of the world, the lonely and joyless existence of an exile. For it was then that flashed upon his inward eye those sublime conceptions which were to adorn the magnificent monument which he had designed in honor of the mistress of his soul—then that he could, in the words of Wordsworth, refer to his angel Beatrice as one

Who ever dwells with me, whom I have loved  
With such communion that no place on earth  
Can ever be a solitude for me—

then that he could declare with Shelley,

In me communion with this purest being  
Kindled intenser zeal, and made me wise

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In knowledge, which, in hers mine own mind seeing,  
Left in the human world few mysteries.

Dowered with a memory which was like wax to receive and like marble to retain, Dante was able to enrich his wonderfully comprehensive mind with that marvelous knowledge which has ever been the delight and the amazement of all readers of the "Divina Commedia." And can we marvel that his graphic pen, aided by such a memory and blessed by such a muse as his, has given us those exquisite word-paintings, those unique analyses of the human heart which so distinguish his matchless work—a work which is an ever-enduring monument both to the poet and to his beloved inspirer?

There are, I know, some to whom this language will seem extravagant and unwarranted. Basing their knowledge of Dante on a cursory reading of his *Inferno*, they can see in the great *vates sacer*—poet-

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prophet—only a heartless cynic and loveless pessimist, and in his “Divine Comedy” only “a poor, splenetic, impotent, terrestrial libel; putting those into hell whom he could not be avenged upon on earth.” These people cannot understand Dante’s love for Beatrice and, still less, his unchanged devotion to her after her death. To such, I commend Carlyle’s “Lectures on Heroes,” in which he declares: “I know not in the world an affection equal to that of Dante. It is a tenderness, a trembling, longing, pitying love; like the wail of Æolian harps, soft, soft; like a child’s young heart;—and then that stern, sore-saddened heart! These longings of his towards his Beatrice; their meeting together in the *Paradiso*; his gazing into her pure, transfigured eyes, her that had been purified by death so long, separated from him so far;—one likens it to the song of angels; it is among the purest utterances of affection, perhaps the very

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purest, that ever came out of a human soul.”<sup>1</sup>

This is in harmony with what Shelley writes in his “Defense of Poetry,” when he asserts that Dante’s “apotheosis of Beatrice in Paradise, and the gradations of his own love and her loveliness, by which, as steps, he feigns himself to have ascended to the throne of the Supreme Cause, is the most glorious imagination of modern poetry. The last canto of the ‘Divine Comedy,’ ” he continues, “is a perpetual hymn of everlasting love.”

To one who has studied Dante’s works with care, it is impossible to conceive their author as either a cynic or a pessimist. His perpetual banishment from all that he loved so dearly was, indeed, a great blow to him. So, too, was the frustration of all his hopes for the aggrandizement of his beloved Italy. But notwithstanding all these trials and disappointments, there is reason to believe

<sup>1</sup> “Lectures on Heroes,” p. 92, New York, 1916.

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that his life was more happy than that of most men—that it was certainly far happier than that of his persecutors. For his was the life of the spirit—a life which from his eighteenth to his fifty-sixth year—the year of his death—was devoted to singing the praises of one who had entered his soul with what he called an ever-burning fire—*col fuoco ond io sempr' ardo*—a life which was blessed by the ever-present image and by the unfailing care of one who he felt was to him both inspirer and guardian angel. For, when her faithful one, in the middle of life's journey, has wandered from his true pathway, it is Beatrice who sends Virgil to conduct him through the dark and dolorous regions of hell. And when the poet has been purified from all sin on the holy mount of Purgatory, it is Beatrice that appears to him in a triumphal car in the enchanting splendors of the Terrestrial Paradise. It is she who, in the abodes of the blessed, accompanies him from

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star to star and, by her sweet smile, guides him to the presence of the Infinite. And as she was to him during her sojourn on earth his very life breath and heart blood, so is she now, in the kingdom of the redeemed, the one who suggests those tender verses of love, those touching words of fragrant thanksgiving with which the poet's immortal epopee is filled.

To understand Dante aright we must remember that he was in many things absolutely *sui generis*. He was especially so in all that concerned her who, as he declares in the *Paradiso*, "doth imparadise my mind" and who was

The compassionate, who piloted

The plumage of my wings in such high flight.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Döllinger expresses the same idea, when he declares that "Dante's relation to Beatrice, to this combination of the earthly

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, XXV, 49.

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and the heavenly, of abstract symbolism with the most living personality, is something quite unique, inexperienced in any other human life. To him she is womanhood in its purity, loveliness and ideal perfection, and, with the remembrance of her earthly beauty, is coupled the conviction, founded upon experiences or visions, that she is his protecting intercessory genius in heaven, as, without knowing it, she had been on earth the guardian angel of his youth.”<sup>1</sup>

Dante kept, and how nobly! the promise which he had made to his Beatrice, who, since the age of nine, had been an ever increasing need of his soul and who gave to it “its unity and the ceaseless rhythm of its song.” And he kept it as only he could keep it. For only he could keep it who was deeply imbued with the childlike faith of the Middle Ages; who was a master of all the knowledge of

<sup>1</sup> “Studies in European History,” p. 92, London, 1890.



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his time; who was a consummate theologian, such as Giovanni da Virgilio averred Dante to be—

Theologus Dantes, nullius dogmatis expers—

and who, besides this, was, as the same singer declared,

Gloria Musarum—the sovran poet of the world.

And how Dante's heart must have thrilled with joy when, after so many vicissitudes, he was finally able to pen the last verse of the *Paradiso*:

L'Amor che move il sole e l' altre stelle—

—The Love which moves the sun and the other stars

and to offer to his Beatrice in Heaven what he had vowed to her in the heyday of his generous manhood. Tasso predicted that Leonora's name would ever be linked with his own and that he and his beloved would both soar together on the wings of fame—

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—Ella ■ miei versi, ed io  
Circondava al suo nome altere piume,  
E l' un per l' altro ando volando a prova.

Dante could, and with greater reason, have made the same prophecy respecting himself and his loved Beatrice. He could have addressed her in Byron's vigorous paraphrase of the above verses of Tasso and exclaimed:

Yes, Beatrice, thou shalt have  
One half the laurel which o'ershades my grave.  
No power in death can tear our names apart  
As none in life could rend thee from my heart.

And what a joyous paeon rises from the poet's loyal heart, when, in his last vision of his angel Beatrice in the deep-domed empyrean, he intones those sweet notes of undying love:

Dal primo giorno, ch' io vidi 'l suo viso  
In questa vita, infino a questa vista  
Non e 'l seguir al mio canto preciso—<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, III, 28.

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—From the first time I beheld her face  
In this life to the moment of this look  
The sequence of my song has ne'er been severed.

Led onwards and upwards by the sweet  
smile of his angelicized inspirer—"the sun-  
shine of his eyes"—Dante was at last in

The heaven that is pure light;  
Light intellectual replete with love;  
Love of true happiness replete with joy,  
Joy that transcends all sweetness of delight.<sup>1</sup>

And as he, with jubilant delight, contem-  
plates his Beatrice

Upon the throne her merits have assigned her,  
Whereon she makes herself a crown  
Reflecting for herself the eternal rays,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dante's brief but comprehensive description of heaven is so beautiful and so in keeping with the teaching of his great master, "the Angel of the Schools," that I need not apologize for reproducing it here in the musical original:

Al ciel ch'è pura luce;  
Luce intelletual piena d'amore,  
Amor di vero ben pien di letizia,  
Letizia che trascende ogni dolzore.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradiso*, XXXI, 71-72.

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he recalls all that she has been to him since their first meeting in their early youth, and, with a heart full of gratitude, he breaks forth in that matchless prayer of thanksgiving and petition which is the culmination of all that he had ever uttered in her praise. No nobler tribute was ever addressed to a woman than the last words addressed by Dante to his angel Beatrice, in which he gives such sublime expression to the sentiments of his grateful and overflowing heart. There is no more beautiful picture in all literature than that which represents the poet lover fixing his gaze on his gracious guide and inspirer, and addressing her in these touching words:

O Lady! thou in whom my hope is strong,  
And who for my salvation didst endure  
In Hell to leave the imprint of thy feet,  
Of whatsoever things I have beheld,  
As coming from thy power and from thy  
goodness  
I recognize the power and the grace.

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Thou from a slave hast brought me unto freedom,  
By all those ways, by all the expedients,  
Whereby thou hadst the power of doing it.  
Preserve towards me thy magnificence  
So that this soul of mine, which thou hast healed,  
Pleasing to thee be loosened from the body.<sup>1</sup>

As the full beauty of this exquisite apostrophe is not exhibited in the translation, the original is here inserted for the benefit of those who may desire to read it in Dante's melodious Italian.

O Donna, in cui la mia speranza vige,  
E che soffristi per la mia salute  
In Inferno lasciar le tue vestige;  
Di tante cose quante io ho vedute,  
Dal tuo potere e dalla tua bontate  
Riconosco la grazia e la virtute.  
'Tu m' hai di servo tratto a libertate  
Per tutte quelle vie, per tutti i modi  
Che di ciò fare avei la potestate.  
La tua magnificenza in me custodi,  
Si che l'anima che fatta hai sana,  
Piacente a te dal corpo si disnodi.

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<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, XXXI, 79-90.

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A smile from Beatrice seated on her throne of glory tells her ever-faithful one—her *fidel d'amore*—that his prayer is answered and that she will be his mediatrix in heaven as she was his inspirer on earth.

Never before had it entered the mind of any poet thus to apotheosize the lady of his affections; to contemplate in her eyes the most sublime mysteries of faith; to introduce her among the most exalted spirits of the heavenly host; to make her the symbol of theology and revealed truth and to constitute her for himself the medium of graces and blessings from the Most High. Thus to apotheosize the young maiden who had won his undying love at the threshold of youth, and to make her the symbol of all that is most pure, most holy, most profound, most elevated, presupposed, as has well been said, conditions which were unique in the entire history of literature—a love very intense and very pure, born at a period of lively

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and simple faith, in a soul profoundly religious, in an intelligence marvelously open to all the knowledge of its time, and served by the most powerful and most delicate poetic talent which the world has ever known.

The experience and achievement of Dante were unique. The girl of nine years, garbed in "a subdued and goodly crimson," whom he first met in the home of her father on that memorable Mayday, when

His soul sprang up astonished, sprang full statured in an hour,

became his beneficent genius and the inspirer of that noble work that the world has named "divine." And as she made him the greatest of poets, so he transformed and transfigured her and "made of her the perfect type of Christian virtue, the ideal symbol of divine science, the living image of that infinite happiness enjoyed by the elect," and, at the same time, he erected in her honor a monu-

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ment more glorious than any ever dedicated to the memory of an Alexander, a Caesar or a Napoleon—one that will continue to delight, instruct and elevate the world as long as the good, the beautiful, the true shall continue to move the hearts and stir the souls of humankind.



## CHAPTER II

### FACT VERSUS FANCY

IN the foregoing pages it has been assumed that the Beatrice of Dante, whom the poet has so lauded in the "Vita Nuova" and the "Divina Commedia," had a real existence—was a woman of flesh and blood. It has been assumed, furthermore, that she was, as stated by Boccaccio, a native of Florence and the daughter of Folco Portinari. This view, however, does not meet with general acceptance on the part of critics and commentators. For a long time past, students of the works of the great Florentine have held many and diverse opinions respecting the reality of the woman whom he has so celebrated in matchless verse, and the nature of the sentiments which he entertained for her. But this divergence of opinions

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should not cause surprise. When we recall the long controversies that have raged respecting the authorship of the Iliad and the Odyssey, of the dramas of Shakespeare and the Synoptic Gospels, we are quite prepared for the strange divergence of views that have prevailed, especially during the last two centuries, regarding the object of Dante's affections, and the character of the love which made both the poet and his ladylove immortal.

It is true that even during the century of Dante's death there were not wanting those who denied the historical existence of the poet's inspirer. Thus Giovanni Mario Filelfo, in his "Vita Dantis Alighieri," saw in Beatrice only a fabled box of Pandora. "Poets," he tells us, "fancy many things simply as an exercise in style—*excercendi ingenii gratia*—and among the figments of Dante's imagination was the imaginary object of his poetic cult—a figment which he

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adorned with all corporeal and intellectual perfections and named Beatrice, the lady of his mind, who raised him to the loftiest heights of beatitude." But of Filelfo we can, with the learned Dante scholar, Marquis Giovanni Giacomo Trivulzio, declare that "to quote Filelfo as an authority is not less ridiculous than to cite the author of 'Don Quixote' as witness to a fact of history. During his life and after his death, Gian Mario Filelfo was well known for a rank impostor and at the present day he deserves no credit."

Scarcely less fantastic than the view of Filelfo was that of Francisco da Buti, who, during the second half of the fourteenth century, lectured on the "Divina Commedia" in the University of Pisa. According to Buti, the lady glorified in Dante's works was not Beatrice Portinari, but Beatrice, a daughter of the Emperor of Constantinople and the mother of the Countess Matilda of

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Tuscany.<sup>1</sup> As, however, this daughter of the Byzantine monarch died a century and a half before the birth of Dante, it followed that in Buti's conception Dante's love for Beatrice was not real but feigned. Buti tells us that he was led to this conclusion only because the names of Dante's beloved and that of the mother of the Countess Matilda were identical. For this reason he had recourse to an allegorical interpretation of Dante's Beatrice and saw in her only a symbol of theology. Judging from what he says in his "*Commento sopra la Divina Commedia*," he was entirely ignorant of the existence of Beatrice Portinari and knew nothing whatever of the explicit testimony of Boccaccio respecting this beautiful Florentine maiden of whom the poet was so deeply enamored. It was only in order that he might find a historic Beatrice that Buti had

<sup>1</sup> "*Commento sopra la Divina Commedia*," Vol. II, p. 647, Pisa, 1858-62.

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recourse to the daughter of the Emperor of Constantinople. In her he found a personage who was well known by fame both to himself and to his auditory, for she had died and been buried in Pisa, where her tomb is still preserved. Buti's theory, therefore, has little more to recommend it than Filelfo's.

It was not, however, until four centuries after Dante's death that any systematic attempt was made to discredit the actual existence of the Beatrice of the "Vita Nuova" and the "Divina Commedia." In 1723 a learned and pious canon, one Anton Maria Biscioni, felt impelled by his zeal for the good name of Dante, who was described as one who had been involved in profane loves, to deny that the sovereign poet was ever in love with a real woman named Beatrice. Biscioni, however, takes care to state that he does not wish to be understood as denying the existence of Beatrice Portinari, or saying anything that would in the least re-

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flect on the noble character of this gentle woman. Unable to deny the historic existence of the fascinating daughter of Folco Portinari, he admits that Dante, on account of the proximity of Beatrice's home to his own—the houses of the Portinari and the Alighieri were only fifty paces apart—may have seen her at a window, or on the street, or in church, or he may even have been well acquainted with her. But he insists that this neighboring maiden is not the Beatrice whom Dante has so glorified in his poems. Nor was it any other living woman whatever, but only an ideal woman—a simple creation of his fancy.

The theory of Biscioni, whose zeal was directed against everything that might savor of erotic concept, or expression, in the works of the purest-minded of poets, was vigorously attacked by the learned commentator Dionisi who defended the veracity of Dante's love for Beatrice and contended that the

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poet's account of such love was not a mere pious allegory, but the record of his love for a woman whose beauty and goodness were irrefragable proofs of God's abiding love, and whose virtues and perfections not only precluded all profane love and seductive desires but also exalted the spirit of our poet, who was so susceptible to their charm, to a state of genuine spiritual blessedness.

Far more fantastic than the theory of Biscioni, as formulated in his "Prefazione alle Prose di Dante," are the views which were promulgated by the notorious Gabriel Rossetti.<sup>1</sup> According to this eccentric commentator, the works of Dante, especially the "Vita Nuova" and the "Divina Commedia," as were also the writings of certain of his

<sup>1</sup> The names of the works in which Rossetti develops his grotesque views are "Disamina del Sistema Allegorico della Divina Commedia," London, 1826-27; "Sullo Spirito Antipapale che Produsse la Riforma," London, 1832, and "La Beatrice di Dante," London, 1842.



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contemporaries, are nothing but a tissue of symbolisms and a code of secret language used by the Ghibellines and understood only by them. These cryptographs, according to Rossetti, became necessary to the Ghibellines after their defeat by the Guelphs and the crushing of Albigensian influence in France and Italy. The key to them, Rossetti will have it, had been lost, until he, Champollion-like, found it. With this key he pretended to be able to exhibit the esoteric character of Dante's works and make known for the first time the real significance of many words, persons and things which occupy so prominent a place in all the writings of the poet who was acclaimed the protagonist of Italian liberty and independence.

In the view of Rossetti, as well as in that of Biscioni and others, the Beatrice celebrated by Dante in both verse and prose had no connection whatever with any living per-



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son. She was but a symbol or figure of the imperial power. The "Vita Nuova," according to the grotesque interpretation of this harlequin commentator, denotes Dante's new course of life after he had cast his lot with the Ghibellines. *Amor*—love—which is the anagram of *Roma*, signifies loyalty to the imperial party. God is the symbol of the Empire, and Satan that of the Papacy. These are but a few instances of the cabalistic interpretations given by Rossetti to words whose meanings are as unmistakable as they are antagonistic to those assigned them by the would-be discoverer of the long-lost Ghibelline code—a code which, it scarcely need be observed, never had any existence outside the disordered imagination of the author of the "Disquisitions on the Anti-Papal Spirit Which Produced the Reformation."

More reverential but scarcely less gratuitous and fantastic than the theory of Ros-

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setti is that advanced by Francesco Perez.<sup>1</sup> With a great display of erudition he attempts to prove that the Beatrice of Dante is but a figure of wisdom, or of the active intelligence, and totally disconnected from a living person. More than this. According to the contention of Perez, Beatrice is but the designation of a quality and should, therefore, be spelled, not with a capital B, but with a small b, thus making the word an adjective which signified "conducing to happiness."

Equally complicated and unwarranted are the views put forth by the German writer, Father Gietmann, who, in his "Beatrice, Geist und Kern der Dante'schen Dichtungen," maintains that Dante's love for the daughter of Folco Portinari is to be regarded as nothing more than a beautiful dream and that the real theme of the

<sup>1</sup> In his recondite work, "Beatrice Svelata," Palermo, 1897.

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poet's muse was the ideal Church, the Bride of God as sung in the "Canticle of Canticles."<sup>1</sup>

The decisive objection to Gietmann's theory, as well as to all idealist and symbolist theories, is the large number of dates and personal details in the "Vita Nuova" respecting both Beatrice and Dante himself. These it is impossible to reconcile with any theory, except that which predicates the real existence of the woman of the poet's praise. Scartazzini, in his "Dante Handbuch," referring to some of the difficulties of Gietmann's symbolism which makes Beatrice the ideal Church, pertinently inquires, "Did Dante, then, in his ninth year, fall in love with the Church? Did the Church first honor him with a greeting when he was eight-

<sup>1</sup> Der vorzüglichste und eigentliche Gegenstand seiner Dichtung kein anderer gewesen als di ideale Kirche d. h. di Gottesbraut des Hohenliedes. P. IV, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1889.

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een? Did he pretend that the object of his love was something other than the Church, and did the Church, on this account, refuse him her salutation and mock him?"

Space precludes notices of theories ex-cogitated by other symbolists and idealists<sup>1</sup>—of Scartazzini, who held many views re-

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of classification, Dante commentators are divided into realists, idealists, and symbolists, according as they regard Beatrice as a reality, an ideal, or a symbol. Those who maintain that the Beatrice of the poet was the historical Beatrice Portinari are known as realists. Those who see in her but a type or ideal of perfect womanhood—*la donna idealizzata* or "*incarnazione di qualità naturali alla donna*"—as Professor Renier phrases it, are designated as idealists. Those, however, that contend that Beatrice—who may or may not have had an actual existence—was but an arbitrarily chosen type or figure to signify theology, or faith, or wisdom, or something else, are classed as symbolists. In their view the name, Beatrice, is, as Dr. Moore expresses it, but "a peg on which to hang the web woven by the poet's imagination, like those of the fictitious personages of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.'" Cf. *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, II, 346-395.

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specting Beatrice, but whose final conclusion was that she was, at least in the "Divina Commedia," if not also in the "Vita Nuova," a mere symbol of the ideal Papacy which leads mankind to celestial happiness, as Virgil, the symbol of the ideal Empire, conducts mankind, represented by Dante, to the highest earthly happiness in the Terrestrial Paradise; of Bartoli and Renier, who see in Beatrice, not wisdom, as Biscioni; not the imperial monarchy, as Rossetti; not the active intelligence, as Perez; not the ideal Papacy, as Scartazzini; not a real woman of flesh and blood, as do all the realists, but only a personification or idealization of womanhood—the ideal woman contemplated in her highest and noblest and most heavenly attributes—the earthly woman who gradually acquires something of the angel—a being vague, abstract, impalpable, which is concentered in every beautiful girl's face, but which vanishes into the most ærial forms. The Bea-

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trice of the poets of the *nuovo stile*—new style — Bartoli avers — “is nothing more than objectivation of an intimate and profound subjectivity.”<sup>1</sup> To him, therefore, the Beatrice of Dante is only an abstraction, and, in this respect, he asserts, “has no more real existence than the Giovanna and Laggia and Selvaggia and other women of the *dolce stil nuovo*, who existed only in the glowing phantasy of their devoted singers.”

Nor shall I discuss the theory of G. Gazzani, who finds in the “Vita Nuova” only the story of Dante’s youthful studies in the faith and who declares that Beatrice herself was faith; nor the equally fanciful theory of C. Grasso, who asserts that “Beatrice in the works of Dante is the stately daughter of his mind, the repercussion in his soul of the mystical ideality of the ages,

<sup>1</sup> *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, Tom. IV, pp. 191-92, Florence, 1881.

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animated and circumfused by the amorous breath of the woman, not that of a woman."

I cannot, however, conclude these brief references to the ideal and symbolic theories without a word respecting the astounding theory evolved by Eugene Aroux, who far surpassed Rossetti in his wild unreason and extravagant party spirit. Following in the footsteps of the daring Neapolitan who sought to prove from Dante's writings the existence of a widely extended conspiracy against the Church of Rome, Aroux went much further and endeavored to show that the author of the "Divina Commedia" was a socialist, a heretic, a revolutionary, an infidel, a pantheist, an Albigensian pastor and a past-grandmaster of secret symbolic language.<sup>1</sup> For Aroux, the "Vita Nuova" is

<sup>1</sup> The titles of his two books, "Dante, Hérétique, Révolutionnaire et Socialiste," Paris, 1854, and "Clef de la Comédie Anti-Catholique de Dante Alighieri, Pasteur de l'Église Albigeoise dans la Ville de Florence affilié à l'Ordre du Temple, Donnant Explication



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an elaborate but artfully veiled presentation of the condemned heresies of the Gnostics and the Manicheans, while Beatrice is nothing more than the personification of the soul of Dante himself. And, according to the secret language of Love's Faithful, of which the visionary Frenchman claims to have discovered the key, the word Gomorrah signifies the Court of Rome; Beelzebub is the Pope; Christ is the Emperor, and Dante, himself, is the miracle of the Trinity referred to in the latter part of the "Vita Nuova"—"is himself the Father, the Son and the Spirit of Beatrice, in whom he contemplates his own syzygy!"

After these rhapsodical and grotesque pronouncements, the reader is not surprised to learn that the author of these strange extravagances has been denominated by *du Langage Symbolique des Fidèles d'Amour*," Paris, 1856, give one a faint idea of their extraordinary contents.



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D'Ovidio, "*el buffone della critica dantesca*" —the buffoon of Dante criticism. And, after reading of the bizarre aberrations and hallucinations of such monomaniacs of adventurous hypotheses as Rossetti and Aroux, we are quite prepared to find one like Jean Hardouin, who, in his "*Doutes sur l'Age de Dante*," out-paradoxes all paradoxes, and maintains that Dante's name and writings are but a simulacrum in literature, and that the "*Commedia*" was the work of a follower of Wyclif in the fifteenth century.

Poor Beatrice! According to Filelfo, she is but "the unsubstantial object of feigned loves"; according to Buti, she is the symbol of theology; according to Perez, she is the active intelligence illuminating the possible intellect; according to Gietmann, she is the ideal Church; according to Scartazzini and Bartoli and others, she is a symbol for the ideal Papacy, the ideal woman, faith, wisdom, contemplation, the knowledge of God,

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the political idea of the Ghibellines and the personification of Dante's own soul. Was ever a woman made the symbol and the ideal of so many and so diverse things and abstractions. Was ever any woman so reduced to airy nothingness by so many captious critics and iconoclastic commentators?

And poor Dante! Was any poet ever so misunderstood, or made the advocate of views and doctrines so fantastic and so contradictory? Did any author ever have his simplest and plainest statements so distorted, or have his works made the subject of so many and so prolonged controversies? Did any great writer ever have it asserted, even by the promulgators of the wildest *delirantium somnia*, that his cherished masterpiece was written in a *gergo*, or cipher language intelligible only to those who had been initiated into the mysteries of a proscribed sect? Has any man ever been so ignominiously treated by the "apes of the

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Dead Sea who make mouths at every prophet as he passes by"? <sup>1</sup>

After all the perverse ingenuity that has been exercised in proving that his beloved Beatrice was but a myth; that the "Divina Commedia," which was to be a monument in her honor such as was never dedicated to the memory of any woman, was but a "symbolic cipher of crypto-heresy," we may well be grateful that Dante himself has been spared to us; that certain hard and stubborn facts of history have so far made nugatory any attempt, like that of the clever Frenchman, Hardouin, to try to prove that the "Divina Commedia" was but a clever forgery, and have made it impossible to consign the poet himself to the limbo of mythological characters, or to place him in the company of Homer, who certain higher critics, basing their conclusion solely on the name of

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Plumptre, "The Life of Dante," p. 211, London, 1901.

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the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey, declare was but "a botcher of songs." What, however, the higher critics will say of Dante, when they shall be as far separated from him by time as we are now from Homer,

That lord of the song preëminent,  
Who o'er the others like an eagle soars,

offers matter for interesting speculations.

But let us now turn to the arguments of those who are defenders of the theory that the Beatrice of Dante's poems had a real existence. To all lovers of the divine poet it is gratifying to know that the most eminent students and commentators of the "Vita Nuova" and the "Divina Commedia" strenuously contend that the inspirer of these matchless works was none other than that lovely Beatrice Portinari, who so fired his youthful imagination that, in the words of Homer, "she seemed not to be the daughter of a mortal man, but of God."

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Among the most prominent of the recent champions of the real existence of Beatrice are such distinguished scholars as Giuliani, Fraticelli, D'Ancona, Délecluze, Sir Theodore Martin and Charles Eliott Norton, who, in their editions of the "Vita Nuova," have either asserted the historic reality of Dante's inspirer, or assumed that the question of her existence is beyond controversy. Thus Giuliani—one of the most scholarly of Dante's commentators—not only denies that there is any allegorical meaning, but goes so far as to declare that "there is in the 'Vita Nuova' nothing which goes beyond simple and literal history," while Charles Eliott Norton, one of the most learned of America's Dante students, positively refuses to discuss the question, and dismisses it by stating in a parenthesis, "I regard as utterly untenable the notion that the Beatrice of the 'Vita Nuova' is an allegorical

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figure.”<sup>1</sup> Almost equally strenuous supporters of the realist theory are such noted Dante scholars as Antonio Lubin, Tommasèo, Balbo, Fraticelli, Isidoro del Lungo, Giosuè Carducci, Karl Witte, Philalethes, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Addington Symonds, Dean Plumptre, Theodore de la Rive, Giacomo Poletto, Dr. Edward Moore, and the learned Dominican Padre Gioachino Berthier.<sup>2</sup>

The chief external evidence for identifying the Beatrice of Dante with Beatrice Por-

<sup>1</sup> Charles Eliot Norton, “The New Life of Dante Alighieri,” p. 111, Boston, 1867.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Moore, probably the most erudite of England’s many distinguished Dante commentators, in discussing the objections to the historic narrative of the “Vita Nuova,” declares, “I could never believe that the book is essentially an allegory, or that the question of its having an historical basis is wholly secondary and unimportant. Quite as soon could I believe ‘In Memoriam’ to be a poetical exercise on an imaginary name, as, no doubt, before it is as old as the work of Dante, will one day be confidently asserted.” “Studies in Dante,” Second Series, p. 115.

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tinari is based on statements made by Boccaccio in his "Vita di Dante" and in his "Commento sopra la Commedia di Dante Alighieri." Although he was but nine years of age at the date of Dante's death, he was intimately acquainted with many of the poet's closest friends and nearest relatives. We know that he was commissioned by the company of Or San Michele, in Florence, to convey to Dante's daughter, Beatrice, who was a nun in a convent in Ravenna, where her father died, a subsidy of ten gold florins. And he tells us in his "Commento" that his information regarding Beatrice Portinari was obtained from one who was most trustworthy, and who was not only well acquainted with her, but was also most closely related to her—*fu per consanguinità strettissima a lei*.<sup>1</sup> Besides all these special sources of information, of which he made actual use

<sup>1</sup> "Il Commento sopra la Commedia di Dante Alighieri," Tom. I, p. 144, Florence, 1831.



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in both the life of the poet and in his commentary on his works, Boccaccio enjoyed all the opportunities of securing general information which were available for sketching the life of one who, in addition to being one of the most noted men of the age, was virtually a contemporary of his biographer and commentator.

That Boccaccio's "Life of Dante," in spite of all objections against the veracity of the imaginative author of the "Decameron," is true in all its important statements respecting the author of the "Vita Nuova" and his relations to Beatrice seems demonstrable beyond peradventure. For not only was he on terms of intimate intercourse and acquaintance with the friends and relatives of Dante but he was also bound to him by special ties of

Il lungo studio e il grande amore<sup>1</sup>—

—The long study and the great love

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<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, I, 83.



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—which so attached Dante himself to his master and author, Virgil.

When, in 1373, the Florentines resolved to establish a public lectureship on Dante, it was Boccaccio whom they selected as its first incumbent. His lectures, which were begun on October 12 of the same year, in the Church of San Stefano, were delivered before a select and critical audience, among whom were, doubtless, many relatives and friends of not only the Alighieri but also of the Portinari and the Bardi. That Boccaccio, in the presence of such an audience, should have made the very positive statements he did about the parentage and marriage of Beatrice, "the falsity of which, if false, must have been so glaring and palpable that its assertion could only have covered him with ridicule," is, as Dr. Moore pertinently observes, quite inconceivable.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edward Moore, "Dante and His Biographers," p. 175, London, 1890.

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Besides the testimony of Boccaccio regarding the reality of Beatrice, we have that of the author of the "Ottimo Commento," who wrote but little more than a decade after Dante's death and who tells us that he was personally acquainted with the poet. He asserts not only the real existence of Beatrice, but also speaks of her as one whom Dante loved with pure devotion—*che egli amò con pura benivolenza*.<sup>1</sup>

Still more remarkable is the evidence of Pietro di Dante, the poet's son, who wrote a Latin commentary on the "Divina Commedia" in 1340,<sup>2</sup> only nineteen years after his father's demise. In certain recently discovered manuscript recensions of this commentary occur statements concerning the identity of Dante and Beatrice Portinari, that are quite as precise and as conclusive as

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, p. 525. Pisa, 1827-29.

<sup>2</sup> "Super Dantis Ipsius Genitoris Comœdiam Commentarium; Nunc Primum in lucem Editum Consilio et Sumptibus," G. I. Bar. Vernon, Florence, 1846.

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those of Boccaccio. Some critics, however, have questioned their authenticity, and maintained that the statements were later additions to the original commentary of the author. If it could be proved that they belonged to his commentary, written in 1340, there could be no further controversy, for then even the most strenuous advocates of the ideal and symbolical theories would be forced to admit that the Beatrice of Dante and Beatrice Portinari were, as the realists contend, one and the same person.

The most remarkable passage in Pietro's commentary, relating to Beatrice, occurs in his notes on the second canto of the *Inferno*, where we read "And because mention is here first made of Beatrice, of whom so much has been said, especially in the third book of the '*Paradiso*,' it is to be premised that there really was a lady, Beatrice by name, greatly distinguished for her beauty and virtues, who, in the time of the author, lived in the

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city of Florence and who was of the house of certain Florentine citizens called the Portinari, of whom the author, Dante, was a suitor. During the life of the said lady he was her lover and he wrote many ballads in her honor. After her death, in order that he might make her name famous, he, in this, his poem"—the "*Divina Commedia*"—"frequently introduced her under the allegory and style of theology."<sup>1</sup>

This passage is so important that all lovers of Dante hope that the last vestige of doubt respecting its genuineness will eventually be removed. Then, by the testimony of Pietro Dante alone, not to speak of other evidence, the long controversy about the historical reality of Beatrice as Dante's inspirer will be forever terminated.

But Boccaccio and Pietro Dante and the

<sup>1</sup> From the original Latin, quoted in Del Lungo's "*Beatrice nella Vita e nella Poesia del Secolo*," XIII, p. 96.

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author of the "Ottimo Commento" are not the only witnesses to the reality of the Beatrice of the "Vita Nuova." In his recent very interesting work entitled "Beatrice nella Vita e nella Poesia del Secolo XIII," the eminent Dante scholar, Isidoro del Lungo, adduces an important document that greatly strengthens the cumulative force of the argument in favor of the more rational view that the Beatrice of Dante was a living woman and that her name, as both Pietro di Dante and Boccaccio assert, was Beatrice Portinari. This document is the will of Folco Portinari, Beatrice's father, who died the last day of the year 1289, but a few months before the death of his daughter who, according to Dante's statement in the "Vita Nuova," departed this life on the 9th of June, 1290.

Folco Portinari, as his will evidences, not only belonged to one of the distinguished families of Florence, but was also a man of

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wealth. Through his munificence was founded the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, in the chapel of which, by the terms of his will, he was buried. Neither this hospital nor its chapel now exists. But the original tomb of Folco, by a peculiar provision of poetic justice, still remains. For, when the hospital which he had established disappeared his tomb was piously transferred to the chapel of the present Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. And here, on his cenotaph, one may still read the words which were carved on it more than six centuries ago. They are: *Hic Jacet Fulchus de Portinarus qui fuit Fundator et Edificator Huius Ecclesiæ et Ospidalis S. Marie Nove et Decessit Anno MCCLXXXIX die XXXI Decembris. Cujus Anima pro Dei Misericordia Requiescat in Pace.*<sup>1</sup>

In his will, after specifying a large number of beneficiaries, among which were numerous religious institutions, Folco Porti-

<sup>1</sup> Del Lungo, op. cit., p. 9.

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nari designates the amounts which he leaves to his own children, of whom there were eleven—five sons and six daughters. To one of the daughters, whom he calls Madonna Bice de' Bardi, he wills fifty Florentine pounds, or as he dictated it to the notary who wrote in Latin—*Item domne Bici etiam filie sue, et uxori domini Simonis de Bardis, legavit de bonis suis libras L ad florinos.*<sup>1</sup>

Bice was a familiar abbreviation for Beatrice. Dante thus calls his lady not only in some of his minor poems but also in the "Divina Commedia." That the Madonna Bice mentioned in Messer Folco's will is the Beatrice whom Dante met at the May festival at her father's house and who, thenceforward, was the object of his unchanging affection and, after her death, the symbol of all that was good and beautiful, there can be no reasonable doubt.

Then, again, we have that beautiful can-

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 113.

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zone in which Cino de Pistoia, one of Dante's most intimate friends, offers consolation to the poet on the death of Beatrice. Reading this exquisite poem, which is conceived in language of deepest and most genuine sympathy, it is difficult to believe that the sentiments expressed concerned only an airy nothing without a local habitation or a name.

A similar indication of the reality of Beatrice is the beautiful sonnet of Dante to his "first friend"—Guido Cavalcanti—in which he expresses the wish that they and their common friend, Lapo Gianni, together with their respective ladyloves, Lady Bice, Lady Vanna and Lady Lagia,

Could be by spells convey'd, as it were now,  
Upon a barque with all the winds that blow  
Across all seas at our good will to hie

And not to talk of anything but love.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Rossetti, "Poems and Translations of Dante," including Dante's "Vita Nuova" and "The Early Italian Poets," p. 326, London, n.d.



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Can anyone imagine three young men, like those in question, finding pleasure in voyaging with three phantoms of their fancy, which have no more real existence than *Ariel* or *Urania*? Is it not more reasonable to suppose that the ladies named were

Warm with the life of breathing womanhood;

and that the Rice of the poet was that gentle Beatrice Portinari whom, with "a gathering of damozels," he once met on All Saints' Day, when her approving smile and gracious salutation caused him to exclaim,

"Blessed are they who met her on earth!"

Such then are the external evidences of the real existence of Dante's Beatrice. They should, it would seem, suffice to convince anyone except those of an age which, as Lowell declares, lectures but does not create,

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This age that blots out life with question marks,  
This nineteenth century with its knife and glass  
That makes thought physical and thrusts far-off  
The Heaven, so neighborly with man of old,  
To voids sparse—sown with alienated stars.

But we have also internal evidence which, taken alone, without the external testimony, is almost conclusive as to the existence of Beatrice as a living woman.

Belonging to this internal evidence is the mass of realistic details regarding Beatrice, which Dante, in the "Vita Nuova," records as actual facts. Many of these incidents are so antagonistic to any allegorical interpretation of this book that we are forced to conclude that they really occurred. Among them, to mention only a few instances, are the statements made by the poet concerning the strange devices he had recourse to in order to conceal his love for Beatrice and the shock he experienced on perceiving his lady at a marriage feast, when he set his foot "on

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that point of life, beyond which he must not pass who would return," and the very positive statements which he makes regarding her age and the date of her death which, as we have seen, occurred but a few months after that of her father, and the wholly unintelligible reason he assigns for his silence respecting the details of Beatrice's death—that "it would be unseemly for me to speak thereof, seeing that thereby it must behoove me to speak also of my own praise"—*essere lodatore di me medesimo*. The very difficulties of these statements, which the symbolic and ideal theories are utterly inadequate to explain, seem to indicate the occurrence to which they refer.

The learned Dantist, Isidoro del Lungo, gives a splendid summary of the subject when he writes: "The 'Vita Nuova' is a book whose coloring, figures and action are imaginary, but which is based upon a foundation of reality. Real are all the facts and

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circumstances, real is it as far as Dante Alighieri and Beatrice are concerned, or the two gentlewomen of whom he made use for his defense, whether introduced for this reason alone or because they had been admired by the poet in his youth. The obsequies of Beatrice's friend and father are real, as is also her brother's friend to whom the 'Vita Nuova' is dedicated and who—though the name, as every other, is concealed—is unmistakably shown to have been Guido Cavalcanti. Real were those fair Florentines enumerated in the *Serventese* of the lovely women of the city, who, in various ways, took part in the psychological development of the story, real, even to the gentle lady who dwelt near the house of the Alighieri and aroused a transitory love in the heart of Beatrice's adorer, and the pilgrims who passed through Florence on their way to Rome. The inspiration of the poem, first vaguely conceived as a celestial glorification of Beatrice,

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is equally true. Her personality, living and true and Florentine, like the others, was first idealized into an abstract woman—after the manner of all poets—and then transfigured and upraised to the sublimity of a symbol by the work of him who, finally conscious of his work, knew that he had ‘said of her things said never yet of any woman.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

An even stronger argument in favor of the historical character of Beatrice is found in the fact that Dante always based his allegories on facts and realities of the outward world. In his “Convito” he tells us expressly that “the literal meaning must always come first; it is that in which all the other meanings are included, without which it would be impossible and irrational to understand the others; and, above all, for the allegorical it is impossible.”<sup>2</sup> That, how-

<sup>1</sup> “Women in Florence,” p. 141 et seq., London, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> “Trattato” II, Cap. I.

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ever, does not imply that Dante attributed historic reality to all his characters. Many of them, like Charon, Minos and Cerberus, were quite mythological, but these, as well as those about whose historical reality there can be no doubt, had a recognized existence outside the poet's fancy. They were all known to fame. None of his characters, like those of Bunyan and other modern writers, was a simple figment of his imagination. For to Dante, as to Petrarch and Guido Cavalcanti and Cino da Pistoia, and all other literary artists of the time, a basis of reality and fact was quite indispensable. And as Giovanna, Selvaggia and Laura, the *donne gentili* of Guido Cavalcanti, Cino da Pistoia and Petrarch, were living persons, so also was Beatrice, the inspirer of Dante, a living, breathing woman. The poets named but followed in the footsteps of the troubadours of Italy and Provence, to whom some real person, not a mere creation of their fancy,

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was the invariable source of inspiration. To them the thought of celebrating the corporeal and spiritual perfections of an inane type or symbol would have appeared as ridiculous as the suggestion that the knights of chivalry offered their services to some *Dulcinea del Toboso* and not to some gracious chatelaine or princess of the blood royal.

From the fact, therefore, that Dante founded his allegories on characters—either historical or mythological—that had a recognized existence, it follows, as a necessary consequence, that his Beatrice, the leading character in his works, was not a mere invention of the poet. To have made, in the case of Beatrice alone, an exception to all the canons of art which he always so scrupulously followed—to have all the action of his immortal works revolve about a mere abstraction, would have seemed to Dante nothing less than a literary monstrosity.

Dante, then, studiously avoided all at-

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tempts to concrete or personify the abstract. He preferred to base symbols on realities—on persons who had an actual existence. Thus, as D'Ancona declares, he does not create a type of human reason but employs in its stead a historic personage, Virgil. He does not create a type of human liberty but gives this signification to the historic Cato of Utica. Every character that he delineates is a human being that has actually lived, not a mere generic figure of vice or virtue. Contrary to those who assign a fictitious body to empty abstractions, Dante gives abstract values to real persons. So it is of Beatrice, who is not woman in general; not, as Bartoli will have it—"a being vague, abstract, impalpable which concretes itself in the face of every beautiful girl"<sup>1</sup> but a particular woman, one who actually lived in

<sup>1</sup> Un essere vago, astratto, impalpabile que si concretizza in ogni volto gentile di bella fanciulla. *Op. cit.*, Tom. IV, p. 191 et seq.



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this world, one who was loved, celebrated and mourned by Dante and elevated by him to represent an idea of sublime physical and moral perfection. Conformable to the art of Dante, in which there is nothing of vacuity or airy nothingness—*sfumato vaporoso*—"Beatrice," declares D'Ancona, "is a woman before becoming a symbol, and she can be a symbol precisely because she was a woman. We, contemporaries of Byron, Goethe, Leopardi, De Musset, Lamartine, who experience what Bartoli truly calls 'the tortures, the refinements, the maladies, the continuous orgasm of sentimentality, may well have these morbid and passionate creations of our spirit—creations industriously formed by the separation of the accidental and the individual in order to arrive at the ideal.' " <sup>1</sup>

Dante, however, proceeded differently, for he made the real a stepping-stone to the

<sup>1</sup> "Scritti Danteschi," p. 131. Florence, 1912.

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ideal, and thus exhibited a sense of proportion and perspective which we in vain search for in modern art which either evaporates in over-refined subtleties, or wallows in the mire. But if modern art is impotent to reproduce that of Dante, let not modern criticism ignore it, or attempt to judge the intellectual processes of the thirteenth century by those of the nineteenth.

Modern writers have become so accustomed to passing everything—history, art, literature, religion—through the alembic of criticism that, by this forced analysis, they arrive at an ideal concept of woman and give it a certain nebulous appearance. And to such a creation of their fancy they dedicate their songs and consecrate their lives. But what is readily accepted now would not have been received in the time of Dante. For had a poet in the thirteenth century sung of an ideal woman in the style of modern symbolists, he would not have been

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understood. The medieval mind always demanded something real as a basis for the ideal.

To our materialistic age, which would ignore the spiritual and supernatural world, everything seems to exist

Only to be examined, pondered, searched,  
Probed, vexed, criticized.

But it was quite different in the time of Dante. To the great theologians and saints and mystics of the Middle Ages—St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bernard, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor—the supernatural world was more real than the material. To them, as to Dante, “the world of the living was but a shadowy appearance, through which the eternal realities of another world were constantly betraying themselves.” And to them, “though still bound round with the fetters of time,”

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Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds  
From the hid battlements of eternity.

To Dante, whom Fogazzaro aptly styles “a mystic in love and a theologian in religion”—who always lived in a world of mystery and with beings invisible to material eyes<sup>1</sup>—“there was more truth, more reality, even, in the allegorical and mystical meaning of things than in their literal and outward aspect.”

This view is clearly expressed in “The Convito,” where he writes, “Since the literal meaning has been sufficiently explained, we must now proceed to the allegorical and true exposition”—*sposizione allegorica e vera*.<sup>2</sup> In this respect he is one with St. Augustine, who holds that the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. a sermon by the late Cardinal Newman, on “The Invisible World,” in which His Eminence declares, “We are in a world of spirits as well as a world of sense.”

<sup>2</sup> “Trattato” II, Cap. 13.

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allegorical is as superior to the literal meaning as the soul is to the body.

He, therefore, who does not appreciate the mystical character of Dante's subtle, dreamy, many-sided mind, and who fails to understand the relative importance which he attaches to the real and to the allegorical in his work, can never arrive at a true comprehension of either the "Vita Nuova" or the "Divina Commedia." Dante is mystical and contemplative in the "Vita Nuova" because such is the character of his genius. His meaning in the "Divina Commedia," as he informs us in a letter to Can Grande, is *polisenso*—manifold—because of his rapidly moving, myriad-minded intellect.

In the beginning of the "Vita Nuova," Beatrice is a real, living woman, and Dante's love for her is a real, genuine love. Those who, like Biscioni, think to elevate Dante by making him incapable of a real, natural, human love, exclude him from the rest of hu-

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mankind. They deny to him a sentiment common to all men, and, wishing to make him something more than a man, they make him far less than a man. They make him all head, without heart; all intellect, without affection. But, to one who studies him without preconceptions, this is not the Dante who reveals himself in his works. The surpassing greatness and excellence of Dante consist, above all else, in the rare harmony of all his powers and faculties—in the beautiful combination of heart and intellect—a harmony and combination which led Ruskin to declare, "I think that the central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante." <sup>1</sup>

Dante's Beatrice, then, according to the poet's habit of attributing several meanings to one and the same thing, or person, must,

<sup>1</sup> "Stones of Venice," Vol. III, Sec. LXVII.

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as D'Ancona has so conclusively shown, be viewed as existing in a threefold capacity—as a woman, as a living personification, and as an animated symbol. It was to her who, in all her transfigurations, was ever the same Beatrice, that Dante consecrated his verse and his affection. For as there is scarcely a moment in the “Vita Nuova” in which Beatrice is nothing more than a beautiful maiden, so likewise is there scarcely a moment in the “Divina Commedia” in which she, who sits near the Virgin Mother in the empyrean, is not also the charming woman who became in the poet’s early youth mistress of his heart and caused him to be borne aloft

On the viewless wings of Poesy.

The “Vita Nuova,” therefore, is the story of a pure and intense love for a woman of beauty and goodness, who gradually through a progressive purification of love

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—a love which by degrees changes to spiritual adoration—becomes the personification of perfect beauty and supreme goodness.

When, however, the affection of the poet is, by the death of his beloved, converted into a holy memory, then we witness that wonderful transfiguration of Beatrice which is so conspicuous a feature of the “*Divina Commedia*,” especially of the *Paradiso*. She then becomes that marvelous animated symbol in which are intimately conjoined both the woman and the personification—a symbol which was foreshadowed when Dante first manifested his love for Beatrice Portinari and saw in her the “youngest of the angels”—one who was so noble and praiseworthy that “she seemed not to be the daughter of mortal man, but of God.”

The glorification of Beatrice was rendered possible by her death, by Dante’s abiding love for her after God “had called her unto Himself,” and by those long years of



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study which he entered upon in order that he might raise to her an imperishable monument of praise.

It is this view which regards Beatrice as being in succession a real woman, a living personification, an animated symbol, but always the same Beatrice, that gives to all the works of Dante that wonderful unity of thought and affection—a unity that resides in a continuous progression and in a continuous purification of love from its birth on the verdant bank of the Arno to its apotheosis in the glorious white rose of Paradise.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alessandro d'Ancona, who has so brilliantly defended the historicalness of Beatrice, in referring to this subject writes:

“The progressive development of the idea of Beatrice in the mind of Dante is, then, the story of his thought from his early youth to his most advanced age. Poetry and art, affection and knowledge, inspiration and meditation have one sole and identical name, as they have but one object—Beatrice.

“A new example and an unheard of miracle of the

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Dante, in writing of Beatrice in the "Vita Nuova," after she "had been made of the

power of love in a lofty and gentle heart! And fortunate Dante, who, in the midst of the sorrows which harassed his days, had a comfort, a hope which no one could lessen or take from him: comfort and hope which formed the bond of unity in so many and so diverse thoughts and events of his life both in youth and in advanced years! Fortunate Dante, who, in affection's memory, found that image of perfection after which, in manhood's prime, his intellect, all athirst, flew in quest of ideal truth and moral beauty! Fortunate Dante, when he recollects that no evil propensity ever defiled his first sighs of love and no blemish in the demeanor of Beatrice ever prevented him from portraying her as supremely pure—from exalting her to the sublimest heights of heaven! Fortunate Dante, who saw and recognized in the beautiful face of a woman that living virtue which spurs one to choose the good and enamors one of the true! And he verily saw this divine light shining in the eyes of his lady, not through a rhetorical figure, but through the intensity of an affection in which he himself was ennobled, purified! How much happier was he in this respect than was a great poet of our age—Giacomo Leopardi, who was inexpressibly miserable, because, feeling within himself a potent yearning for the eternal Idea, he was, through sheer intellectual and men-

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citizens of eternal life," gives a beautiful, half mystical expression to this thought when he sings:

Il piacere della sua beltade  
Partendo sè dalla nostra veduta,  
Divenne spirital bellezza grande,  
Che per lo cielo spande  
Luce d'amor, che gli angeli saluta—

verses to which Dante Gabriel Rossetti has given this very felicitous translation:

From the height of woman's fairness, she,  
Going up from us with the joy we had,

---

tal desperation, compelled to write that he had never recognized this Idea reflected in a woman's face and to affirm that, if it had ever appeared in sensible form, it would thus have become less beautiful." *Op. cit.*, p. 206 et seq.

How different the mental attitude of Leopardi from that of St. Francis of Assisi, who, like Dante, "saw in Beatrice a creature of the divine goodness and beauty and gave glory to God in her, worshiped God in nature and called upon the sun, moon and stars to give Him honor." F. Hettinger, in "Dante's Divina Commedia; Its Scope and Value," p. 16. London, 1887.

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Grew perfectly and spiritually fair;  
That she spreads even there  
A light of love which makes the angels glad.

Beatrice, then, I repeat, was a real woman, before she became a personification or a symbol; was as really a person of flesh and blood as was Dante himself, who has been truly characterized as “the most luminous example in literature of the chivalrous ecstasy of love”—of a love, be it insisted, that had its root not in an abstraction or a tenuous ideal, but in “the beatitude” of his earthly life—Beatrice Portinari. Against the statements of those who would make Dante’s inspirer but a golden dream which hovered above his eyes, I prefer to accept that of the poet himself, who describes Beatrice as a living woman “of the Christians of the thirteenth century”—*ella fu de’ Christiani del terzodecimo centenario*. And I also prefer to accept, as proof of Dante’s chivalrous passion for Beatrice, the conclud-

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ing words of the "Vita Nuova," in which the poet promises to say of her what has never been written of any woman, words that are emphasized by "the whole tenor of the 'Divina Commedia'" and likewise by Dante's emphatic assertion that Beatrice "had revealed to him all wisdom and virtue"; and, in doing so, I am but accepting the testimony of the most competent witness—the poet himself—one whom John Addington Symonds has declared to be "the greatest, truest, sincerest man of modern Europe."<sup>1</sup>

But why, if Beatrice was a real woman and not a symbol, did not Dante marry her? Why if she was really the daughter of Folco Portinari, and if he loved her with that intense, abiding love disclosed in the "Vita Nuova," did he marry Gemma Donati, to whom he never makes even the slightest ref-

<sup>1</sup> See his charming "Introduction to the Study of Dante," p. 259, London, 1906.

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erence in any of his works? Why is it that he never alludes to the marriage of his beloved to Simone de' Bardi, when this event must have been one of the deepest concern to him?

Dante has not been pleased to throw any light on these puzzling questions, and we are, therefore, left to the vaguest conjectures. It may, however, be asserted that in a purely psychological work like the "Vita Nuova" which is solely a chronicle of the origin and progression of his love for Beatrice, detailed information about family affairs would have been out of place. The poet deals only with the influence which the lady of his mind had upon him—with what was spiritual and immortal. If he suffered any heart-wounds when his beloved became the wife of another, he does not, like a Petrarch or a Rousseau, lay them bare to the world. There is in the "Vita Nuova" none of the catastrophes and cataclysms of inordinate passion de-

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scribed in the works of Byron and De Musset, Goethe and Leopardi; none of the acute and violent notes which are the chief characteristics of the sinful loves portrayed by so many of our modern novelists and dramatists. On the contrary, the love of Dante for Beatrice, although intense and enthusiastic, is always pure and exalted; it is a love that ever leads him to higher things; a love which, in the language of Wordsworth,

Teaches less to love than to adore;

a love which, in the words of Dante himself, cannot be understood by those who have not experienced it—

*Intender non la puo chi non la prova—*

a love which Sainte Beuve has beautifully described as a world within the soul, a glowing sun, an eternal poem—

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—Un monde au fond de l'âme, un soleil échauffant,  
Un poème éternel.

Again, it is a pure assumption to assert that Dante ever aspired to the hand of Beatrice. So far as Dante himself informs us, his love for the daughter of Folco Portinari was like that of the knight of chivalry who had for his motto *Dieu et ma Dame*, who, while having God as the final object of his adoration, saw in his lady not only the symbol of every virtue but the image of that heaven which he, by purity and nobility of life, hoped one day to attain. It was the ecstatic state of feeling which Provençals called *joie* and which the Italians of the Renaissance designated as Platonic love. It was an unselfish enthusiasm which ennobled the lover and exalted him above all mean impulses and sensual desires. It was a species of homage to the beloved one which was common during the age of the trouba-



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dours, but which has long since disappeared—a “chivalrous devotion to a woman, neither wife nor mistress, by means of which the spirit of man, were he knight or poet, was rendered capable of self-devotion and noble deeds, and of rising to a higher ideal of life.”

It was, so far as we know to the contrary, a species of Platonic love which transformed the actual into the ideal; which made the beauty and love of the living, breathing woman the resplendent avatar of what Goethe calls “the eternal feminine.” It was a blending of the real and the ideal like that so delicately expressed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, when, in “The House of Life,” he writes:

Lady, I fain would tell how evermore  
Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor  
Thee from myself, neither our love from God.

It was, too, a passion that never ended in marriage—a passion whose end and aim was

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the privilege, on the part of the lover, to sing his lady's praises and devote himself wholly and unreservedly to her service. It was a chivalrous passion like that of Jaufré Rudel, Prince of Blaya, of whom his Provençal biographer writes: "He fell in love with the Countess of Tripoli, though he had never seen her, for the good report that he had of her from the pilgrims who came from Antioch, and he made many poems concerning her with good tunes but scanty words. And from desire to see her he took the cross and went to sea. And in the ship great illness came upon him so that those who were with him thought he was dead in the ship; but they succeeded in bringing him to Tripoli; to an inn, as one dead. And it was told to the countess, and she came to him, to his bed, and took him in her arms; and he knew that she was the countess, and recovering his senses, he praised God, and gave thanks that his life had been sustained

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until he had seen her; and then he died in the lady's arms. And she gave him honorable burial in the house of the Temple, and then, on that day, she took the veil for the grief that she had for him and for his death." <sup>1</sup>

Singing of his fair lady love, whom he had never seen, Rudel declares:

All other loves I here forego  
Except the love of her afar;  
For none more beautiful I know  
In any land or near or far—  
  
—Ja mais d'amor no'm jauziray  
Si no'm jau d'est' amor de lonh,  
Que gensor ni melhor no'n sai  
Ves nulha part, ni pres ni lonh.

Another thing to bear in mind, when discussing the questions under consideration, is the frequency of marriages of convention

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in "The Troubadours," p. 44 et seq., by H. J. Chaytor, Cambridge, 1912. Cf. also "Les Chansons de Jaufré Rudel," pp. 15 and 21, éditées par Alfred Jeanroy, Paris, 1915.

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in Florence in the time of Dante. Such marriages were matrimonial alliances—the union of two families—rather than the union of two loving hearts.

The young woman had not the disposition of her heart or hand. So far was this from being the case that she was not infrequently promised in marriage while yet a mere child. It was her father who gave her in marriage, as it was her husband who received her. There was no love-making before the marriage was celebrated, nor were the wishes of the young couple at all consulted. In a city like Florence, which had so long been agitated and divided by the sanguinary feuds of the Neri and the Bianchi, the Guelphs and Ghibellines, marriage was but too often regarded as a means of cementing private interests, or of strengthening the power of certain factions, or of extinguishing age-long dissensions and making peace among powerful families who had long been antagonistic

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to one another, or who belonged to different and almost irreconcilable parties. So frequently, indeed, was marriage made the medium of uniting contending families and factions, that the commune of Florence did not hesitate, when civil or political interests required it, to make a liberal appropriation of money to further certain matrimonial alliances which could not be effected otherwise. Because of such family, civil, and political reasons, Del Lungo, who has made an exhaustive study of the questions in controversy, does not hesitate to assert that both the marriages of Beatrice and of Dante were brought about without any regard whatever to the psychological drama and the poetic love of the "Vita Nuova."<sup>1</sup>

That Beatrice not only knew of Dante's

<sup>1</sup> Io son d'avviso che il matrimonio di Beatrice, come il matrimonio de Dante, siano l'uno e l'altro . . . fatti assolutamente esteriori, estranei e indifferenti al dramma tutto psicologico, all'amore per rima, della "Vita Nuova." Op. cit., p. 67.

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love for her but also reciprocated it in a pure and noble way, there seems no doubt. Certain passages in the "Vita Nuova" appear to imply this, and the words addressed by Beatrice to Dante in the Terrestrial Paradise, after a ten years' separation, would lose all their beauty and pathos if we were to imagine that their attachment was not mutual. But once it is admitted that the Beatrice whom the poet met on the Mount of Purgatory was, in very truth, Beatrice Portinari, or, to use Dante's own words,

Quel Sol che pria d'amore me scaldò 'l petto<sup>1</sup>—  
—That Sun which erst with love my bosom  
warmed—

and that she fully reciprocated his love, then we have not only one of the most touching but also one of the most beautiful episodes in all literature.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso*, III, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Joannes de Serravalle, bishop of Fermo, who was born about thirty years after Dante's death, and who

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But whatever reasons may be assigned for the marriage of Beatrice to Simone de' Bardi, it was probably well for poetry and letters that she died young—she was only twenty-four at the time of her death—and that she did not marry Dante Alighieri. For had she lived long, or had she become the wife of her *fidel d'amor*, we should not now have the "Vita Nuova"—"the first and tenderest love story of modern literature"—a work that, in the words of Charles Eliott Norton, will "be read with appreciation and

wrote when the traditions about the poet's love for Beatrice must still have been fresh in the minds of his admirers in Italy, states explicitly that Beatrice reciprocated Dante's affection. In the preamble to his Latin translation of the "Divina Commedia" he informs us that Dante not only historically and literally loved the damsel—*Dantes dilexit hanc puellam hystorice et literaliter*—but he also states in quaintest style that their love was mutual and lasted during the whole of Beatrice's life—*Philocaptus fuit de ipsa, et ipsa de ipso, qui se invicem dilexerunt, quousque vixit ipsa puella.* P. 15.

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responsive sympathy so long as there are lovers in the world and so long as lovers are poets." Had she lived long as another's wife we should, as Tommaséo remarks, have a precursor of Petrarch, but a more militant and a more virile Petrarch.<sup>1</sup>

Nor would we have the "Divina Commedia," at least as it now exists. For Beatrice, as Scherillo declares, was not only the muse and the protagonist of Dante's song, but she was at the same time the creator as well as the creature of his genius—*e la creatura e la creatrice insieme del genio di Dante*. Had, then, Beatrice lived long, like Laura, and had Dante, like Petrarch, spent

<sup>1</sup> "Se Beatrice viveva, noi non avremmo nè la 'Commedia' quale abbiamo ora, nè la 'Vita Nuova' stessa: avremmo un precursor del Petrarca più guerriero, più uomo. Occupato dall' amore, non avrebbe forse Dante ambito le cure della discorde repubblica, non forse sofferta la dignità dell' esilio: bella non sarebbe del nome e dell' esempio suo la sventura. Di grande arcani è ministra la morte." "Commedia di Dante Alighieri," p. 26, Milan, 1854.



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his time in singing the praises of his mistress, it is not likely, as Tommaséo points out, that "he would have engaged in the affairs of a discordant republic, or suffered the dignity of exile."<sup>1</sup> He would, probably, have escaped all the great misfortunes that pursued him during so many years, but the scholars of the world, irrespective of clime and creed, would not now, to quote the words of a recent writer, see in the "*Divina Commedia*" "the highest fruit of Christian civilization," nor declare with Cardinal Manning: *Post Dantis Paradisum nihil restat nisi visio Dei*—After the *Paradiso* of Dante nothing remains but the vision of God. Nor would they acclaim Dante as the first humanist, as the originator of the Renaissance, as the first modern man of letters; nor would Dean Milman have written: "Christendom owes to Dante the creation of Italian poetry, through

<sup>1</sup> "Commento ■ la Divina Commedia," p. 38, Milan, 1860.

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Italian, of Christian poetry"; nor would Tennyson have greeted him in these noble and touching words:

King, that hast reign'd six hundred years, and  
grown  
In power, and ever growest

I, wearing but the garland of a day,  
Cast at thy feet one flower that fades away.

The Beatrice of Dante was, then, a woman who had an actual existence; a woman whose beauty the poet could admire; whose smile made him happy; whose death he mourned; whose memory was an inspiration. Encircled by the most radiant aureole that was ever devised by human genius, the figure which is a woman in the "Vita Nuova," an angel and a symbol in the "Divina Commedia," appears before us after being six and a half centuries in the tomb, repeating the words attributed to her by her immortal bard, when they met in the earthly Paradise:

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Guardami ben: ben son, ben son Beatrice—<sup>1</sup>

—Look well upon me, I am indeed, I am indeed  
Beatrice.

When fair Aphrodite, the goddess of  
beauty and love, left her son Æneas for her  
favorite home in Paphos, a

Heavenly fragrance sweet  
Was breathed from her ambrosial hair—

—Ambrosiæ comæ divinum vertice adorem  
Spiravere.<sup>2</sup>

But Beatrice—as Scherillo so beautifully  
expresses it—departing from the world, has  
left “the musical harmonies which she so well  
knew how to evoke in the heart of the great-  
est of poets—harmonies which are propa-  
gated and perpetuated in the exquisite son-  
nets and canzoni of that booklet of love  
known as the ‘Vita Nuova’—harmonies  
which ascend and diffuse themselves among

<sup>1</sup> *Purgatorio*, XXX, 73.

<sup>2</sup> “*Æneid*,” Lib. I, v. 404 et seq.

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the Gothic arches of that august temple consecrated to her memory—the ‘Divina Commedia.’ ”<sup>1</sup> And this same Beatrice—Beatrice Portinari—who was the first to cause Dante’s heart to beat with love; the first to inspire him to tune his lyre and sing in matchless numbers; the one to lead her *fidel d’amor*

From time to that great sempiternal day,  
when, in the words of Michelangelo,

Heaven opened wide its doors to him—  
will henceforth—in spite of those who see in her but a phantom of the poet’s imagination, or a symbol that has been made to signify a score of different and contradictory things—have a fixed and definite place in the story of her age and in the ever-enduring poetry and romance of our race. To her, of

<sup>1</sup> “La Vita Nuova di Dante,” p. 42, Milan, 1911.

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■ truth, we can apply the words addressed  
by her poet lover to his master Virgil:

Di cui la fama ancor nel mondo dura,  
E durerà quanto il mondo lontano—

—Of whom the fame still in the world endures  
And shall endure, long-lasting as the world.



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Nov 5 '43	JAN 20 '51	
Feb 16 '44	FEB 20 '51	
MAR 27 '55	MAR 6 - '51	
Mr 26 '46	SEP 24 '58	
Ap 8 - '46	MAR 12 '54	

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